

the night we met (take me back) by camerasparring

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Summary:

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figure out exactly what makes him feel so lightheaded before his body gives up and pitches head-first into the hallway floor.

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Author's Note:

The title is obviously from the Lord Huron song because it's on the Reddie playlist I've had going for three straight months. Richie drinks a lot in this fic to deal with his feelings and Eddie has some panic attacks and they're generally bad at feelings, so be aware of that. I'm also thoroughly enamored with Spaghetti as a nickname because the miniseries is adorable.

This is my hand at both a PLOT and PORN and I spent WAY too long on it. Who woulda thunk!? I hope you enjoy!

It's 3pm on a Thursday. Richie sits on his couch, flipping through a copy of People his agent left here last week. During his now weekly, "Dude, I know you're going through a thing but you and I both know you need money and no, another bowl of Captain Crunch is not sufficient for dinner, especially not for a 41 year old man" meetings.

So what if his career had stalled? People couldn't just fucking chill while he worked through his shit?

Before Derry he had been a professional machine. An empty body in the shape of a man they could fill up with sexist and pandering jokes and watch as they came pouring from his mouth on stage. Jokes in, money out. He simply smiled and tried not to think too deeply about, well, anything. Now he is... well. To be fair, it doesn't seem as though much has changed.

But it really has. Derry has all but ruined him. It's been more than a month, and if he thought he was a shell of a man before, it was nothing compared to this. The deep ache of pain and loss in his chest is like a small bomb that goes off every few hours and immediately reloads for the next hit. The night terrors that he hasn't had in three decades - the worst of which leave him screaming, which he wouldn't know if his asshole neighbors hadn't knocked on his door one day

("Look, man, I don't know if you're having really kinky sex or if you've been to, like, *war* or some shit, but we have a fucking baby now and I just, anyway, could you just like scream into a pillow or something?"). The constant stream of memories that he now can't forget despite his best efforts, (Eddie riding his bike next to him, Eddie's angry pinched face, Eddie's arm cast, Eddie's different fanny packs, Eddie's voice, Eddie's eyes when he was impaled, Eddie's *blood* on his glasses) and all this shit keeps *coming*, good and bad interspersed, because his brain isn't used to emotions and clearly can't tell the difference between love and trauma, and honestly, he can't blame it, cause the two have been a tangled web of confusion for him since, well, always. And that isn't even considering the intense and simultaneous sexual identity crisis and awakening.

The former means those memories once again coming in handy to make it painfully obvious to him that he's at *least* bisexual, and pretty much always has been, and on top of losing the man he loved, it all feels a bit much to process. The latter means when his brain decides to take a break from the loop of dreams about Eddie's death and the many ways he could've stopped it, it fits in a few poorly-timed sex fantasies, mostly starring the one and only Eddie Kaspbrak. And one, single, solitary time, the pizza guy who arrived in the middle of Richie jerking off, but he assumed that was a combination of association and the fact that the guy was small and didn't laugh at his jokes. Richie Tozier wanted to bone Eddie Kaspbrak, and there was really nothing he could do about that but mourn and cry and jerk off some more and then hate himself for sullyng Eddie's memory with his dick.

All this to say, when a knock comes to his door on this particular Thursday afternoon, he is halfway through his second whiskey of the day and deciding between jerking off for the third time or going back to sleep.

Then the fucker knocks *again* after what must've been five seconds, and Richie shoves his dildo (purchased due to the aforementioned crisis/awakening) in his table drawer, pulls up his pants, and decides he's going to give this person a piece of his mind. When he finally opens the door, his first thought is, "Wait, *did* I put my pants back on?" because his brain is mush, quickly followed by "what the

absolute *shitballs*?”

Eddie is standing in his doorway. Eddie knocked on his door. Eddie is staring him dead in the eye. Eddie is here and *alive* , and Richie glances down to confirm his pants are *actually* on because arousal and grief run parallel in his brain lately and he's not sure if he is having a heart attack or popping a boner.

Both. Probably both.

“Is this yours?” Eddie asks, not aware of Richie's mental breakdown, past or present, pointing Richie's old jacket at him accusingly, the jacket he'd worn in Derry, the jacket he'd...

“What?” Is all he can spit out, and Eddie rolls his eyes and Richie could cry. Is he crying? He's probably crying.

“Are you Richie Tozier?”

Eddie stares at him again, and Richie doesn't understand the question, but he didn't really clarify the first one either, so he lands safely back there.

“Uh, my jacket is... wait. Eddie?” He feels like he should confirm this, maybe he's hallucinating all of this, losing his mind, he bets it's the fucking pizza guy that looks like Eddie all over again, the jacket is really a pizza and he's officially lost his mind. He snatches the jacket from Eddie and sniffs at it.

“What... are you doing?”

Eddie stares at him even *harder*.

It's a good question. Even if it isn't Eddie, he can *see* Eddie, and isn't that enough? Who cares if this is a hallucination? It's random and simple and a helluva lot less confusing than Eddie covered in blood or, well, buck naked. Though he wouldn't have minded that behind his front door, the passage to his rock bottom.

Richie drops the jacket on the floor and pulls at Eddie's shoulders with his hands until they're pressed together. Eddie makes a noise of complaint that quickly dies when Richie starts to cry. Eddie clings a

little tighter, then pats at his back a few times before pulling away. That's when it hits Richie: did Eddie ask him his... name?

Richie wipes away a tear and tries to pull himself together.

"Eddie? You're alive?"

Eddie shakes his head, rubbing a hand over his face.

"I'm assuming we knew each other, from the crying and the dumb look on your face."

Richie is lost. But he's looking at and talking to and being insulted by Eddie, so he's also blessedly slow on the uptake, and has instead opted for thoughtless swooning.

"What?" He wipes at another tear: is he still crying?

"I woke up in a hospital in Maine. This was the only identifying item I had on me, and it has the name Richie Tozier on it," Eddie leans down to retrieve the jacket, pointing it at Richie again, "It's stitched into the tag like it belongs to a nine year old, but there *are* no nine year old Richie Toziers from Maine, only you, and people said they saw you there a few-" Eddie stops, presses a hand to his torso, his... where he...

"Do you need to sit down?" Richie asks, grabbing at Eddie's arm, and tries not to feel blown apart when Eddie quickly shrugs him away.

"No, no, I'm coming off a long flight and I feel this heavy-" he stops again, looking up at Richie, and Richie wants to throw this whole confusing conversation in the trash and kiss the light back into Eddie's eyes.

Suddenly, Eddie looks determined.

"I don't know who I am. I thought you might be able to help me," he holds up the jacket and Richie's heart stops. "Are you Richie Tozier?"

It's probably the scotch at 2pm, or maybe that he skipped his usual Captain Crunch break in favor of a morning cry session because it is

Thursday after all, or maybe that the love of his life is back from the dead and doesn't know who he is, but Richie doesn't have time to figure out exactly what makes him feel so lightheaded before his body gives up and pitches head-first into the hallway floor.

Richie comes back to consciousness with a hand pressed to his back and a loud "what the *fuck*" ringing in his ears. He cracks an eye open and sees blood. What the fuck, indeed.

"You... you okay, man?" Eddie asks, semi-crouched next to him on the floor. Richie groans. He dabs gently at his nose and his fingers come back bloody.

"My nose is bleeding."

"Yeah, yes. I can see that." Eddie's voice is gentle and Richie remembers with a start that he's not *his* Eddie. He's not *anyone's* Eddie, or *any* Eddie, for that matter. He tries to turn over and hits the door jam with his hip. "*Fuck*," he hisses, and Eddie grimaces sympathetically.

"Let's get you up. Do you have a first aid kit?" Eddie grasps his hands and helps Richie to his feet. Richie looks down at the small pool of his own blood. His mind reels.

"I thought you didn't remember who you were."

"What?"

"You still *sound* like Eddie," Richie says, and Eddie looks down, stays quiet. "I mean, what the fuck, Eds? You really don't remember who you are? This isn't some Derry bullshit, this is like... legit bad-romance-novel-goddamn-soap-opera shit? I can't-" he stops when his head throbs. Eddie looks concerned, and grabs at Richie to lead him inside. Richie wants to pull away, but he's at the mercy of not-Eddie, who still looks a lot like Eddie, and he's also slowly losing the will to do anything but cry and nurse his wounds.

Eddie seats him on the couch, unspools a few sections of paper towel, and starts pressing it to Richie's nostrils. They sit like that for awhile. Richie thinks it might be the longest the two of them have been this quiet together since they would read comic books in his room. He misses Eddie with a painful ache and he's right in front of his face. He resists the urge to touch him, but he needs some sort of reprieve. He has dreamt of this moment so many times, he never thought he'd end up with a bloody nose while Eddie stared at him, unknowing and scared.

"I'm gonna take that as a yes," Eddie says, breaking the silence.

"Hmm?" Richie takes the paper towel from Eddie's hand now that his nose has stopped actively bleeding.

"You're Richie. I'm assuming that's why you fainted." Richie's jaw drops.

"I didn't *faint*," Richie protests, and Eddie swallows what sounds like a laugh.

"What do you call that, then?"

"I... I'm... I was surprised, and I've had some booze-"

"It's the middle of the day."

"It's *nearly* evening, and I'm-"

"It's literally three pm."

"-I'm light-headed, Jesus Christ, can't a guy have a visceral reaction when his b-" he freezes. He presses the paper towel back to his nose and takes a breath. They just look at each other for a beat.

"I don't know exactly what to do here," Eddie says as his leg starts to bounce. He used to do that when he was nervous. Not for the first time, Richie wonders if this is all somehow a big fucked-up prank.

"Are you fucking with me?" Eddie startles at that, blinking a few times like Richie threw something in his face.

“Why would I be making this up? You think this is fun for me? I have no idea what’s going on here.”

“Well that makes two of us!”

“So *help me*,” Eddie says, his eyes pleading, and Richie falls against the back of his couch with a sigh.

Eddie looks like he might burst into tears. Richie feels like a giant asshole. He’s suddenly very glad that his nose is bleeding, he fucking deserves it. He’s surprised Eddie has yet to punch him and make it a double whammy. He takes another breath and tries to think.

“Tell me what you remember,” he says, and Eddie hesitates. Wrings his hands on his lap. Richie rethinks. “Or do you want me to start?”

Eddie nods.

Richie told someone somewhere that he would give anything to get Eddie back: whispered into the water of the quarry, sobbed into his pillow at night, screamed in the worst of his most coherent dreams. This isn’t what he’d *ever* had in mind, but maybe he needs to take what he can get.

“Your name is Edward Kaspbrak.” He expects Eddie to stop him there, yell “the fuck, Rich, you actually thought I lost my memory? God, you are way too gullible, dumbass.” But instead Eddie just stares, eyes squinted like he’s bracing for a punch. “You were...” Richie’s throat catches. He squeezes at the bloody paper towel still in his fist. He stares down at his blood and feels the room spinning. He needs a drink.

“I can’t do this,” he says, fleeing to the fridge for a beer. Eddie doesn’t move.

“I’m sorry,” he says, so quietly Richie is positive he misheard him.

“Why the fuck are you apologizing?” Richie catches himself and takes a breath. Then another swig of his beer. The empty bottle of scotch on the counter taunts him as he blinks away the last of his tears. He looks up to see Eddie sunken in his armchair, face pale.

Eddie's always been small, especially compared to Richie, and sickly, although that's debatable. But this is different. Richie sees it for the first time: he's scared shitless. He didn't think it was possible for his heart to break again after leaving Eddie in the sewers, but it does.

"Ed- man, a lot happened the last time you and I saw each other. I thought you were dead and it was *bad*, if the day drinking and the pathetic look on my face haven't given it away - I am a mess."

Eddie nods. Richie sets down his beer and fishes his phone out of his pocket. He has an idea, and at this point, involving a third party that has neither a drinking problem nor amnesia seems a safe bet.

"Who are you calling?"

"Help."

Bev answers immediately, she always does, and that's saved his life more than a few times in the recent past.

"What's up, hot stuff?" she's got a light giggle still stuck in her throat, and the familiar sting of jealousy spreads through Richie. He shakes it off quickly.

"Hey, um, are you sitting down?" He doesn't know how to pitch this, they all have a fair amount of traumatized shit leftover from Derry, but no matter what she might think, there's no way in hell she'll be prepared for this. Fear laces through her voice.

"N... no, Rich, are you okay? Do you need me to come to you?" There's shuffling in the background and Bev whispers something to someone, presumably Ben, and Richie's first instinct is to turn down her offer. It's become second nature. She's offered to drive to him several times since he returned from Derry. He always says no, makes up some bullshit excuse that he knows *she* knows is bullshit, but he has to because he knows if she really showed up, and really *saw* him, he might never pull himself back together.

His eyes fall back on Eddie.

He might actually be a lost cause.

"Yes, Bev. Please. I don't even know how to-"

"I'm on my way. Sit tight," he hears mumbling in the background. "Oh, I'm bringing Ben." She hangs up.

Eddie raises his eyebrows and Richie tries to smile.

"Help is on its way."

"Someone named Bev," Eddie says, like the fact is fuzzy on his tongue. Richie nods.

"Right. She's part of the... of our group. There's six of us. Now. Used to be, well." He can't bring himself to think of Stan, it's too much, this is all way over his head and he hasn't even begun sifting through his feelings around Stan. And it looks like Eddie's here to make sure it stays that way. He's failing miserably at this and it's why he needs Bev, he can't remember how long a drive it is from San Francisco to LA, he's about to Map it until he sees Eddie watching him expectantly.

He opens up the Losers text chat instead and sends a quick, "Mayday to anyone in the area, stop by Casa Tozier ASAP, news you'll want to hear, Bevy is on her way. Nope, not fucking around," tosses his phone onto the coffee table in front of Eddie and then tosses himself onto the couch.

"I'm calling in all the forces."

"Family? Are we all... related or something?"

Richie turns it over in his mind.

"You could say that."

"Great, I was hoping you'd be cryptic about this, it's making everything a lot easier to process," Eddie deadpans.

Richie swallows down the rising panic with the last gulp of beer left in the bottle.

The texts come in almost simultaneously.

For a moment he wonders if they all FaceTimed to formulate a plan first, which would frankly be adorable, but either way, all the Losers get him the game plan within thirty minutes of his SOS message.

Bev and Ben let human logic get the better of them and decide to leave tomorrow morning. Mike is jumping on a plane. Bill is in LA doing some negotiating, so after he checks out of his hotel tomorrow, he'll be on his way.

Every time his phone lights up, Eddie leans over to look, something desperate clinging in his eyes, and Richie hopes he never again forgets what it's like to be surrounded by such a warm, safe, loving bubble of support. Eddie seems lost in the dark, and Richie would do anything to drag him inside their bubble instead.

Now that backup is confirmed, Richie heads toward the kitchen.

"In a completely predictable turn of events, help won't arrive until morning," Richie starts, opening the fridge and grabbing two more beers, "and I have it on good authority that I can't keep silent for long, no matter how fucked up the topic of conversation." His eyebrows waggle as a habit, he falls into it so easily with an audience, which Eddie has always so raptly and reluctantly been. It must be muscle memory, because Eddie's lips pinch together and he squints his eyes and that's how Richie knows he's got him. "So let's get drunk and see if we can't seduce both of these broken brains into giving us something worth talking about."

"*Jesus*," Eddie whispers, snatching the beer from Richie's hand.

They start with the pieces, both of them pulling themselves apart and

putting each other back together.

“So he was sort of the leader?” Eddie asks after Richie’s spiel about Bill. Richie flinches.

“Obviously,” he clinks their bottles together, “keep up, Spaghetti, it’s a long cast of characters.”

“...Spaghetti?”

“Let’s save the questions for the end of the presentation.”

The no-question rule lasts five minutes.

“It was kinda like I had always known it, but it had been behind some sort of... veil?” Richie shivers, trying to recount how he forgot most of his life.

“So you did you remember all at once?” Eddie asks.

“Not really? Bits and pieces.”

“Did certain things trigger memories?”

“A little, yeah. But also sometimes no.”

“Did all of you have the same experience?”

“I didn’t... really ask?” Richie’s hemming and hawing, and he hears Eddie heave a sigh. Eddie’s getting all flustered, and Richie finds it positively adorable. He wants more.

"I'm *trying*, man!" Richie knows he's poking, and he also knows it isn't fair, but he can't stop himself.

"Try *harder*!"

"You first!"

Eddie looks surprised but he puffs out a laugh, and Richie smiles harder than has in a month.

Eddie's laughter feels like slowly and painfully patching up a wound.

Richie knew his recitation of Ben's postcard-love-poem in a snooty British accent would kill.

Eddie is practically doubled over. Richie is fleetingly concerned he's in pain, but there's nothing but joy in his eyes.

"You fucking *memorized* that?"

"Are you kidding? The *romance*, Eds, the sheer *romance* of it." He grabs at his heart to drive the point home.

"I'm not sure keeping someone's signature in your wallet for twenty-seven years is romantic."

"We all have our things."

Eddie sighs a quiet, "yeah," and Richie tries not to think of carved initials and the cracked glasses in his dresser drawer.

When Eddie asks about his parents, Richie stops himself from Googling Munchausen's-by-proxy and making your mom jokes, and instead settles for, "Way out of my wheelhouse, Kaspbrak, but we'll put that one on the rain check-list for when the more emotionally-mature children arrive."

He pulls out a pad of paper and scribbles "Sonia" next to a big number one. He follows it with a number two and fully intends to write "Myra," but the pen sticks in his hand. It might make him an asshole, but all he can think is: let me have him just a little bit longer.

"We named *ourselves* the Losers?"

"It was a dif- we were b- I mean, *fuck*," Richie barks a laugh, "yeah, stop looking at me like that, it was a term of endearment!"

Eddie stares.

"The doctors thought I was fucking with them, yeah."

"Glad I wasn't the only one," Richie says. Eddie scoffs, but there's a laugh in there somewhere.

Richie knows there's much more to this story, but he doesn't push it.

“We sliced the middle of our fucking hands,” Richie mimics the motion of the piece of glass over his palm. Eddie looks down at his clenched fist and blinks.

“Oh yeah, he got bandaged up before the big battle and we left Bowers-”

“No, you.” Eddie holds eye contact with his beer bottle, his voice small, “Are you okay?”

A lump works its way through Richie’s throat. None of the Losers have mentioned him killing Bowers since everything happened. It’s made a few guest appearances in his nightmares, the fact that he’s now technically a murderer, even if he was saving Mike.

The buzz from the beers and the adrenaline of sitting across from Eddie makes it easy as pie to deflect.

“I am now that I’m lookin’ at you, Spaghetti-man.” Richie winks and Eddie blushes and the familiarity burns through the room, licking at both of them like flames.

“I think you’re wrong about that ‘growing on me.’”

“Give it time, you used to love it.”

“Bullshit,” Eddie snaps, and Richie hoots in laughter.

Try as subtly as he might, Richie isn’t able to glean any more details about Eddie’s soap opera amnesia episode. And his version of subtlety translates to obnoxious and in-your-face to most, so he doesn’t harp on it. He sees the pain and confusion in Eddie’s eyes, and that’s

enough for him to know Eddie needs more help than he's able to offer right now.

Luckily, Eddie is still more than willing to spin wild theories about *why* it all happened.

"Do you think it's that... thing?" Eddie spreads his hand wide, a gesture toward the unknown. The beer has made him sleepy, but he can't stop asking questions. Richie shrugs.

"Pennywise?"

"Mmm."

"Could be. You *seem* like you. And you know how to... human. You're being a human."

"Mmm," Eddie grunts, forceful in agreement.

"So it's not all gone."

"Maybe not," Eddie says, and Richie's heart strains against the glimmer of hope.

The clock in his living room died a few weeks ago and Richie didn't replace it - didn't see the point. Time, like most things, had lost his interest. So when he puts his feet up on the table and knocks into his phone, the glow of "four am" is a shock to his system. He stretches his legs and yawns.

"You need some sleep. There's a guest bedroom down the hall," he points in the general direction, frowning at Eddie's cheap jeans and button down. "I'll get you some sweats of mine. You'll swim in 'em," he tries not to picture Eddie in his clothes, he *really* does, "but we did just meet, so you might wanna wait a week before sleeping in the buff."

Eddie rolls his eyes, rises from his chair and starts collecting the empty beer bottles from the table. This time, the pain in Richie's chest refuses to go unacknowledged.

"You're married." Richie mumbles it, like it's off-hand, like he's

saying “put the bottles in the blue bin next to the microwave,” like it hasn’t been running on a loop in his head for the past eight hours.

Eddie promptly drops his armful of bottles.

“I’m *sorry*, sue me, there was a lot to cover!”

“Oh, and you just conveniently happened to forget that I have a-” Eddie gives his head a quick shake and Richie’s heart almost stops. “Who... I’m actually *married*?”

Richie stares down at the linoleum of the kitchen and takes a few measuring breaths.

“Yes,” he turns to grab the dustpan he hasn’t used in two years and Eddie steals it away before he can think to stop him.

Eddie turns to clean up the mess and Richie is grateful for the distraction. The broom sweeps at the glass, and Eddie is an expert cleaner, spotty memory or not, so there’s not much of a reprieve before the wrath rears its adorable head.

“I feel like that’s the first thing you tell a person when they show up at your door with no memories,” Eddie starts, dumping the glass and then waving the broom wildly as his face begins to redden, “like, ‘Hey, yeah, I’m the guy you’ve been searching for but you should probably know you’re legally bound to whole other *person*.’”

“Are you trying to say there’s some sort of fucking protocol for this?”

“No, I just-”

“Because I must have missed the memo!”

Anger and confusion and pure, unadulterated *heat* flow through Richie’s veins, and of course, a little arousal, because Eddie seems genuinely *upset* that he’s married, and Richie feels that spark of hope

deep in the pit of his stomach again. He pushes it down because now is certainly not the time to manhandle Eddie against the fridge and kiss the hell out of him, and maybe the memories back *into* him, although Richie makes a note of that technique to test out later, when things have settled. If they settle.

Pressing a hand to his temple, Richie reels at the thought of getting to know Eddie all over again. This evening had to end sometime, and now Richie wonders where the fuck they're supposed to go from here.

Eddie's just staring at him, hands on his hips, brow furrowed.

"Look, I'm sorry-"

"No, I-I didn't mean to get so-"

"It's a lot."

"No shit."

Richie looks up and Eddie is smiling uneasily. Richie smiles back.

"Can we... just sleep?" Richie offers, and he's pretty sure Eddie's going to insist they discuss his marriage, ask for a picture or a name or a *gender*? But instead he shuts his eyes and sighs, defeated.

"Yeah. Yeah. I don't think I can take much more," he says with a pained smile, and Richie's heart clenches. Arms hanging sadly at his sides, Eddie starts walking toward the bedroom hallway. "Haven't slept well since I woke up, couldn't-" he mumbles the rest, using the wall as an anchor until a doorway appears he can slip into. Luckily, it's the right one.

The springs creak when Eddie's body hits the bed. Richie almost to go check if he's breathing, but instead finds his own room and crawls into bed, where he promptly passes out until late the next morning.

No nightmares, no screaming, and no sex dreams.

Well. Two outta three ain't bad.

The Losers arrive within 48 hours, as promised.

Beverly and Ben come together, clasped hands and concerned looks. Richie pops the door open fully and braces himself to catch either of them in case they pull a Tozier. Neither of them do, but Ben is close, and Bev immediately bursts into tears.

Mike shows up a few days later, flown in from Florida. His tears don't come as quickly as Bev's, but when they do show, they're deep, frequent, and painful to witness.

Bill is the last, his eyes wide with surprise when he takes in the rest of them, all gathered in Richie's living room, as they have been since each of them arrived. They seem to think Eddie needs people huddled around him constantly, and Richie finds it overwhelming. It's *all* overwhelming. For all of them. But Eddie has it the worst, and all Richie wants to do is save him. If he couldn't once, he's damn well going to figure out how to do it now.

"Can we give the guy some space?" Richie says, shooing them away when Eddie starts to clutch at his chest. Bev shoots him a look he pointedly ignores. "And lighten up on the questions. He knows less than we do."

Richie sees the relief in Eddie's eyes and clenches his fist.

Having Eddie in his home has been difficult, but also life-saving. Their lightning speed catch up session eased some of the tension, but they still dance around each other awkwardly, neither quite sure how to act, and it makes Richie's stomach hurt. He had gotten used to soothing himself via masturbation, but that seems off the table with Eddie in the next room. At first, it was easy. Then on the second day, he glimpsed Eddie in his own sleep clothes, a Led Zeppelin shirt hanging loose on his frame, rubbing sleep into his eyes, and Richie had to spin quickly on his heel to hide the involuntary erection that appeared.

After that, he made a pact with himself to take Eddie clothes shopping as soon as possible. Richie had self-control, but he was still human.

It's good to have the apartment filled with people.

His people.

"Sorry, Eddie, we're all reeling," Bev presses a hand to Eddie's knee and he moves from the touch immediately. It fills Richie with a sick satisfaction, knowing Eddie's aversion to touch isn't just about him.

"I know. I have no idea what this is like, to have me show up here. But it was all I had to go on."

"Sure, honey. I'm glad you found us. We're all so glad to see you again, no matter the circumstances." Bev almost starts to cry, Richie can see it welling up, but she stops herself. He breathes a sigh of relief.

"We love you, man," Mike says, and Eddie scans the room as if he's looking for confirmation. Everyone audibly agrees while Richie picks at the label of his beer.

"Rich?" Bill asks.

He looks up to see everyone staring at him expectantly. None of his muscles will move, but he forces the words out.

"I... of course, Eds," he feels a twinge in his chest, like his heart is trying to pull at something that isn't there. "We're here for you, bud."

This time Richie can't ignore the look Bev holds for him. Her eyes are soft, pleading, sad. She's the only one who knows, who truly *knows*. The rest of them dragged him out of the house on Neibolt, chalking it up to Eddie saving Richie's life in the sewers, a bond of heroism that none of them could understand. But Bev knows it's more. She saw it.

And he told her.

It was the worst night he ever had. A night he thought might never

end, or perhaps it would end sooner than the universe had planned.

The nightmares were oppressive. Every time he woke, rolled over, cried and fell back asleep, they would envelop him again. He was at his wit's end and he needed someone who understood.

Her voice was in his ear before he even realized he'd dialed.

"I miss him, too, Rich," she said, and he believed it, really knew if anyone felt it quite as deeply it was her, and it made him sob a little harder.

"Bev, I think I," he stopped, sniffed, took a breath, "I think I really. I think he was *it* for me." Richie pressed a hand to the center of his chest and it felt like a promise. Bev let silence linger a beat.

"I'm so sorry, Richie."

It felt like the closest thing he could get to healing.

Just like her eyes on him do now.

Eddie's eyes are there, too, and Richie's heart feels squeezed from both sides.

"Knock knock."

Bev stands in the doorway to Richie's bedroom, bags under her eyes, hair frazzled, like she's been running her fingers through it. He smiles at the sight of her.

"Come to check on the sad-sack?"

"I think you might have some tough competition in that department for once," she answers. He has to give her that - the mood in the last few days has been pretty somber. Eddie returning is something of a miracle, but none of them are equipped to help him. They mostly just

hang out all day, talking and reminiscing, and although that seemed to help Eddie at first, now it leaves him exhausted and overwhelmed. It's been about a week since everyone arrived and the situation is slipping into "We Need A Long Term Plan" territory.

"Yeah," Richie sighs. Bev moves further into the room, motioning to the spot next to Richie on the bed. Richie grabs at her hand, pulling her down to sit.

"How are you?" She weaves their fingers together.

"God, I'm... I'm just *peachy*, man." Bev laughs, a sharp noise in the quiet bedroom.

"Yeah, you look it. We're all having a *ball*, this is *great*," she puts on a voice and Richie practically giggles. He feels that happy swoop in his stomach when she makes him laugh. Bev bumps his shoulder with hers, and they sway together a few times. Richie thinks for a moment. He really wants to talk to *someone*, and that's not a familiar feeling. But for Beverly, he thinks he can bite the bullet.

"I'm a lot of things," he sighs, and she nods. "I can't even pin most of them down. This is so fucked up and weird and it hurts and also it's really fucked up. Have we talked about how absolutely fucked up this is?" He looks to her, as if she could possibly answer, but she just watches him. "Eddie is *alive*. He's in my goddamn guest room wearing my clothes but I'm not ecstatic or relieved or... whatever other good things I would be feeling right now under any other circumstances," he presses a hand to his temple, trying to get ahold of himself.

"Everyone here is lost. Seems like our lot in life: dealing with completely bizarre and new situations," she starts, gently, and Richie already feels something like tears welling up. It's been such a long week. He didn't realize how much he missed seeing Bev in person. "But we're together. We always figure it out."

"We're together *now*. But you all have lives. You have to get back to them at some point. Didn't you and Haystack get a dog or a cat or a... lizard together or something?" Richie says, but Bev plows through his walls like they're made of air.

“She’s a dog, yes,” she says, and Richie cringes. He’s never been an animal person. “Bill and Mike were just talking about renting a place around here. Mike’s wanted to be in a new city and Bill can write anywhere now that his movie has wrapped.” Her voice is so steady and calm, like she has answers to all of his questions, understands all of his feelings and loves him no matter what. He knows that she does. And it’s terrifying and so, so comforting. “And Ben and I are constantly driving in and out of the city. We can commute on the weekends for now, and who knows, maybe we’ll find a place a little closer in time,” she smiles, and he nods.

Richie turns that over in his mind. Having all of the Losers within shouting (or rather, group-texting) distance is heavily appealing. The suffocating weight that’s been on his chest for a week begins to lessen.

“Okay,” he says, simply. Bev pats at his hand. “I’m happy to have him here, I promise.” He crosses a hand over his heart and she laughs, her cheeks flushing.

“I know, babe. You seem tired, but I can still see that look in your eyes.”

“What, the “I-don’t-know-what-the-fuck-I’m-doing” look? Again, lots of competition there,” he stretches out his back, wincing when something cracks.

“No, something akin to happiness, perhaps,” she says, eyes down, “whatever it is, it’s not complete and utter desolation.”

“Yeah,” he sighs, knowingly. “I’ve had about enough of that.”

She presses their joined hands to her heart. “Me too.” She stands up, kissing his forehead quickly. “We’re heading out. Ben’s practically an old man. Can’t keep him up past midnight.” Brushing a strand of hair from her eyes, she looks fond, and Richie can’t even find it in himself to be jealous. He’s never seen her as happy as she’s been in this past week. Even with the concern and weird shit, he catches Ben and Bev looking at each other frequently. And there’s something more to it than the rest of them have together. Something he thought he and Eddie... well.

“Go put ol’ Grandpa Hanscom to bed, Driving Miss Daisy. I’ll see you in the morning,” he tries for a smile, but he’s hit the ceiling on expressing emotion. She doesn’t seem to mind.

“Night, Richie.”

“Night, sweet cheeks.”

She waves a hand at him, either a goodbye or a scolding, and then he’s alone. As alone as he can be, with Eddie in the next room and Bill and Mike setting up camp in the living room. They both have enough money to get a hotel room like Ben and Beverly, but they insist on keeping him company. Richie will never admit he sleeps better with them there.

They’d never let him hear the end of it.

When Richie wakes the next morning, he decides to focus on the silver lining. Everything else will be dealt with as it comes. And when he stumbles into the kitchen and sees Eddie eating cereal out of one of his bowls, one foot tucked under him in his chair, Richie can’t help but think he’s a pretty lucky bastard, all things considered.

There’s just one topic that scares the ever-living daylights out of him: Eddie’s marriage.

They haven’t discussed it much since that first night. When everyone arrived it *did* seem to be one of their first questions, and he got lots of angry glares from Eddie each time it came up. He almost felt bad, but seeing glimpses of angry Eddie again was a sight for sore eyes. The rest of them seemed content leaving it be: Myra had been informed of Eddie’s death soon after they all left Derry, and more time for Eddie to settle into this reality seemed kinder than forcing him into more emotional and turbulent conversations before he was ready. Richie still feels like he’s waiting for the other shoe to drop. But for now, Eddie is here, in his pajamas, eating Corn Flakes like he’s eighty (he

and Bev clearly have a similar type), and Richie is determined to live in the moment.

He pours himself a cup of the sludge coffee that Eddie made and plops down into the seat across from him. He's not sure if Eddie has forgotten how to make coffee or if he just needs this much caffeine to get through his days, but either way, Richie loves it.

"Morning," he says, and Eddie smiles. It's too early for Richie's heart to flutter, but it sure gives it the old college try.

"Good morning. Sleep well?"

"Yeah, actually. Hard," Richie answers, slightly surprised. Eddie nods.

"Me too. I sleep well here," Eddie says. Richie gulps down some coffee and tries not to think about what that means.

"So what's the plan for to-"

"I've decided not to contact my-Myra for a little while," Eddie interrupts with a grimace, and Richie coughs down the rest of the liquid in his mouth. They stare at each other for a moment.

"Oh. Yeah, that's... that sounds good, Eds." Richie hates the stutter in his voice, but he's not sure what else to say. Eddie swirls the milk in his bowl, watching Richie carefully.

"I've also decided to start therapy," he says. Richie's brain tries to catch up as quickly as possible. "Bev said it helped her a lot through, well, everything, and she found the name of someone she thinks would be good."

Eddie keeps looking at Richie, waiting for him to speak, as if he's asking permission. Richie shrugs.

"If Bev thinks it's a good idea, that probably means it is," Richie says, and then a thought occurs. "Is this therapist... local?"

"Yeah, I think so," Eddie answers, looking concerned.

“Nice,” Richie says, for lack of a better... anything, and Eddie shifts in his seat.

“I don’t want to impose on you anymore than I already have. I would try to find a place around here but I don’t exactly have a job, I guess I could try but that feels like-” Eddie’s voice gets increasingly shaky, and Richie wants to help him out, but also doesn’t want to assume. “Would you mind if I... kept using your spare room?”

Richie hopes his cheeks aren’t bright red. Just all his dreams coming true, no big deal.

“Stay,” he says, and it makes Eddie beam, his shoulders visibly relaxing. Richie wants to hug him, but he’s still not big on touch.

“You sure?”

“Of course. Stay.”

Eddie’s dimples threaten to give Richie a heart attack, but he does his level best at keeping it together. He deserves a fucking trophy after this week. Richie Tozier: Best Emotional Mess Masquerading As A (Kind of) Normal Human.

“Good. Okay. Thank you.”

“You know, you’re kind of freaking me out,” Richie says, and finally Eddie’s smile falls off his face. Richie doesn’t want him upset, but he needs a damn break from the constant reminder that the idiot in his home is fucking cute as *hell*.

“Oh?” Eddie says around a bite of food.

“Yeah, I’m not used to you being so nice to me.” Richie winks, and there it is: the pink cheeks, the crinkled forehead, the wide eyes. That’s how Richie knows Eddie is still in there somewhere.

“You went a whole conversation without calling me some iteration of Spaghetti. I’m rewarding good behavior,” Eddie says, and Richie goes hot all over.

Eddie stands, setting his bowl in the sink and leaving Richie alone at

the table. Bill's head pops up from the couch, where he'd evidently been sleeping, his face lined and one eye squinted.

"He still *sounds* like Eddie," Bill says, barely above a mumble, and Richie throws his hands up.

"Right!?"

It takes Bill and Mike three weeks to find a suitable place to rent. Richie loves having them around, and he imagines if they had all managed to go to the same college, Eddie included, it would have played out something like this. Just with fewer aching joints and bottles of Pepto Bismol.

Soon before the move is set to happen, Eddie is at his first therapy session and Richie feels like he's crawling out of his skin. Worry itches at him. He had practically pushed Eddie out the door earlier that morning, breakfast bar in hand, trepidation in his eyes. But as soon as he was gone, the panic set in. He knows Eddie will be fine, he's probably needed therapy for a long time, even before this amnesia nonsense. And it will be good for him to talk to someone removed from the situation. An unbiased third party. Someone without clown baggage, perhaps.

When Mike offers a game of living room basketball after watching him fidget for fifteen minutes, Richie rockets out of his chair to set up the court. He brings in a small, empty trash can from his room and pushes the couch and chair to the outskirts of the room to give them space. Bill grabs the neon, inflatable bastardization of a ball they've been using, and then they're off to the races.

It gets contentious fast.

Bill's mouth hangs open in horror as he watches Mike's shot land squarely into the trash can.

"You d-d-dick!" Bill screams. Richie cackles.

“Every time. Every fucking time you are surprised that I have any sort of dexterity,” Mike says, pointing an accusing finger at Bill.

“I thought you were on my *side*!”

“What? We’re not playing *sides*, what are you, five?” Mike yells back. Richie watches them bicker and wonders if this is how people felt when he and Eddie did their back-and-forth.

Bill reels back, hand to his chest. “I thought we agreed it was always us against R-R-Richie.” His stutter always reappears when he’s upset.

Richie gasps.

“You *fuckers*, I knew it! This is why I always lose!” he says, retrieving the ball from the trash can and throwing it to Bill. “I knew you assholes were threatened.”

“We weren’t supposed to say anything,” Mike says, grimacing at Bill. Bill rolls his eyes but Richie sees the light in them.

“Every man for himself, I s-see how it is,” Bill says. He immediately shoots and misses. Richie can’t stop the loud guffaw that bursts from deep in his chest.

“It’s always been every man for himself, dickwads!” Richie finds the ball and lines up for his shot. “I can’t wait to tell Eddie you two have been cheating.”

On cue, Eddie’s key hits the door and Richie’s heart begins racing. He cranes his neck to see Eddie enter.

“Speak of the devil!” Richie says, and Bill makes a constipated noise.

“Richie, th-throw the ball.” He glares at Bill, because seriously what the fuck, they know the priority level in this house and Dumbass Basketball with Cheating Losers is not high on the list. Eddie is at the tippy top. Bill at least has the audacity to look sorry. He chucks the ball at Bill’s face and follows after Eddie, who is heading to his room.

“Eds?” He calls, and Eddie stops and turns toward him. He looks like

he's aged ten years in the past two hours. His arms dangle limply at his sides, and Richie knows that means he's tired. The memories may be gone, but Eddie's body language hasn't changed. Small blessings.

"Hey, sorry," Eddie says quietly. "Didn't really wanna make it a thing."

"Oh yeah, sorry, Tweedle Dum and Tweedle Stutter are out there rigging the game," he says, loud voices beginning to emanate from the living room. "Probably shouldn't leave them alone, they'll either change all the rules or be full-on wrestling by the time I get back." Richie laughs, but Eddie just blinks back at him.

"So, I'm guessing from the look on your face that therapy is a no-go?"

Richie hates prying. Well, actually he *loves* it, but navigating communication with Eddie since his return has thrown him for all sorts of loops. He finds himself actually asking pertinent questions and being understanding, and honestly, he hardly recognizes himself. But a complete mental and emotional breakdown will do that to a guy.

"Uuugh," Eddie says, hanging his head and balling up his hands, like he's summoning the energy. "No, it's... *fine*. Just a lot. And who the fuck is prepared for this? No one's got training in what I'm going through. I don't think she really had any idea what to do with me. And neither do I!" Eddie seems emboldened by his own emotion, becoming more animated with every word. "I don't know what to do here! Am I trying to get back to who I used to be or am I trying to put together a new life? What do I even want? Who the hell even am I? It's just all too much." Eddie's huffing and puffing. Richie can barely breathe.

Everything Eddie is saying makes so much sense to him, he's felt all the same things, and simultaneously felt guilty for feeling them because it wasn't *him* who lost his memory. Co-opting Eddie's pain is a big no-no, but sometimes Richie has no idea how exactly *he's* supposed to feel about all of this. How he's supposed to help, how he's supposed to walk through life having his best friend back but without being able to fully feel it.

“Shit,” Richie breathes, all he can really say to all *that*. Eddie laughs, a high and keening noise, and Richie runs a hand through his hair.

“It’s-I don’t know. I guess therapy went fine? It’s not like it’s a quick process, that’s what she said, at least.” He sounds unsure, mousy and nervous, pressing his body back into the wall, shrinking away. Richie nods.

“Certainly got you feeling some things. Isn’t that what head-shrinking is for? Emotions and stuff?”

“You sound classically trained,” Eddie snaps back. He looks shocked it’s come out of his mouth, but Richie gapes at him, thrilled and halfway through a snort of delight. Eddie follows suit and laughs in spite of himself.

Even though Richie is an idiot, a subtle dumbass through and through, Eddie falls into their flow with ease, not a moment of hesitation. Something fills Richie up, again and again, lapping at his feet and threatening to pull him out to sea, lost in the deep. He reaches for Eddie, overwhelmed with how much he wants him close, his hand closing the distance between them easily, resting on Eddie’s shoulder. They fall together in laughter for a brief moment, foreheads close, mouths open in shared joy that is all too familiar. Eddie’s hand comes up to pat at Richie’s hip, and Richie freezes.

They pull apart in less than a second, both shaking like they’re waking up from a dream. Eddie clears his throat. When their eyes meet again, he still looks tired, but something different from before that Richie can’t quite parse out.

“You’ll get there, Eds,” Richie says, hoping it’s worth something. “You’re making a move, trying to figure it out. That’s gotta mean progress eventually.” Richie doesn’t dare touch him again, he doesn’t want to push his luck, no matter how good it felt to laugh and rest on each other like when they were kids. But Eddie looks grateful, that small smile pulling at his lips, and Richie almost suffocates with how much he loves this man. He’s spent his adult life being unaware and now he’s completely unable and he’s not sure which is worse.

“Thanks, Rich,” Eddie says, and Richie opens his mouth, waiting for

something stupid to come, when they both hear a lamp crashing in the other room.

They both flock to the noise and find Mike and Bill on opposite sides of the living room, each pointing a finger at the other, a broken lamp in between them. Eddie groans.

“They’re moving out soon, right?” he says, and Richie nods.

“T minus two days.”

Eddie never returns from therapy in a happy mood, but it’s all a process. At least that’s what Becky says. Becky is, of course, Eddie’s therapist, and he likes to use her name in different intonations to signal what he thinks of what she has to say. Sometimes he throws Becky into air quotes, as if it’s allegedly her name, and sometimes he utters her name like she’s a fucking Ivy-League trained scholar, a messiah who’s inside Eddie’s own head and helping him understand it.

The second time’s a little better than the first. Eddie doesn’t head straight to the bedroom, but he still has that small, sad smile on his face when Richie asks him how it went. Richie makes dumb jokes until it cracks wide.

The third time, Bev and Ben are visiting when Eddie returns, and Richie isn’t sure if that was planned, but either way it’s good, because the four of them sit around the table and feed Eddie dinner and ply him with wine.

The fourth time is the worst of them all, and Richie is sorely unprepared.

The front door slams closed and Richie jerks awake with a start. Eddie’s a blur in the hallway before Richie can blink the sleep from his eyes.

"Jesus," he swears just as another door slams, this time the one to Eddie's bedroom (they'd given up calling it the 'guest room' about three weeks ago when it was made clear Eddie wasn't going anywhere). He carefully stands up, his left calf fighting back with a charley horse. Hopping over toward the bedroom, Richie rubs at his leg and holds himself against the wall. Eddie emerges, face red, and Richie braces for emotional impact.

"Not now," Eddie says before Richie has even opened his mouth. Richie puts his hands up, surrendering.

"Just checking. After two slams, I always investigate."

Eddie gives him nothing. He wipes at a tear on his cheek, brushes past Richie and heads to the kitchen.

Verbose isn't the word Richie would use for this Eddie. When someone gets him going, he can ramble with the best of them, but it takes some encouragement. Or some alcohol. Other times, it's like a dam breaking. Saved up and bursting forth without much control. But most of the time, he's quiet. Taking everything in, nodding and squinting, smiling or waving a hand. Richie misses his soliloquies about germs and disease, his long-winded rants scolding Richie about how wrong he is, passionate enthusiasm about a topic that always brought on a pink blush and chapped lips. But he knows it takes time, which seems to be the catchphrase of the hour.

Richie bites back everything that threatens to spill from his mouth and instead returns to his seat on the couch.

The fridge door opens a few times, and Richie can't see what Eddie is doing, but he sure can hear him. Seemingly every single food item from the fridge is thunked loudly onto the counter. Silverware clatters, liquid splashes, it sounds like some sort of messed up food war has broken out. Richie tries to picture the carnage, but then figures he shouldn't bother - he knows Eddie will end up cleaning everything with twenty minutes. It's all for show.

"...not even worth it!" Richie catches at the end of one of Eddie's sentences, and he quirks a brow, wondering when would be appropriate to approach the splash zone. Eddie makes his decision for

him, peeking into the living room and meeting his eye line.

“So...” Richie starts, and Eddie bursts into tears. “Oh, *shit*, Eddie, I’m sorry,” he climbs off the couch and follows Eddie back into the kitchen, grabbing the first pot he can find. “Ignore me, man! Keep slamming! Get feral! You wanna break some plates?” Richie has a small red dish from Target hoisted above his head, ready to go, but Eddie emits a strangled cry, sniffing desperately.

“Don’t you *dare* throw that!” Eddie takes it from him gingerly, as if it’s actually worth anything, and places it back in the drying rack. He turns on Richie, tears still flowing, despite his best efforts.

“Well if you’re not gonna let me break something you’re gonna have to talk.”

Eddie takes a few breaths, pressing a hand to his chest.

“What if I don’t...” he gasps again, he sounds like he’s drowning, and Richie stops himself from reaching out to touch. Controlling that urge has become second nature, even after the Forbidden Hallway Touch a few weeks ago. “What if I *never* remember?”

Richie may as well have thrown that plate, the admission breaking between them like shards of glass. Sheer panic and terror overwhelm all of Richie’s bodily functions, and he wants so desperately to flee but knows he can’t. Eddie needs him. Eddie needs him to make him laugh or tell him everything is going to be okay when that’s the furthest from what seems to be the truth. Frankly, Richie has stopped himself, many a time, from wondering exactly the same thing. And also wondering if it matters.

“Eddie-” Richie starts, no idea where he’s going to end up, when Bev bursts through their front door, frantic.

“Are you two free tonight??” She’s breathless and smiling, and Richie isn’t sure if he’s relieved or annoyed by her sudden interruption.

“Lady, him and I have nothing *but* time,” Richie answers, gesturing between he and Eddie, “but you’re gonna have to explain why you’re asking before I tell you if we’re willing.”

"It's been weeks, nay months, well, years? I wouldn't count the Jade reunion cause that ended with far too much blood and spiders," she says, not off to a good start, but Richie is patient because it's better than the alternative: answering an emotionally painful and tumultuous question from Eddie, who is currently frozen in time, looking between Richie and Bev like a child waiting for his parents to make a decision. "It's been a long time."

Bev stares at them. Eddie audibly whimpers. Richie is confused.

"Since..."

"Since we had any fun!" Bev exclaims, the weight of her joy threatening to tip Richie's resolve.

"Fun," Richie repeats. Eddie scrubs a hand over his face.

"I don't know, Bev," Eddie starts, and Bev throws a hand up between them.

"I know, I know. Therapy has been tough." Eddie meets Richie's eyes for a heavy moment and he nods. Richie wants to wrap him up in a blanket and never let anyone hurt him again. "But that's exactly why you need this. Why we *all* need this."

There's a long moment, all three of them surveying the damage of the past couple months. Richie's ready to continue being hesitant, but Eddie's smiling. It could light up a million rooms, a whole suburb of houses, and Richie feels like he could buck up for just about anything if Eddie keeps smiling at him like that.

"Fuck it, I could use a night off from all this," Eddie says. He rubs hard at his eyes, removing the last evidence of tears. Bev cheers, but Richie doesn't want to give himself away quite so easily.

"*Language*, Spaghetti! Has Becky taught you nothing of propriety?"

"What do you think therapy *is*, you tall tree of assholes, a charm school?"

Richie gapes at him. "Don't tease me like that, Eds. You, balancing a book on your pretty little head? Learning which one is the soup

spoon?”

“Bev, where were you thinking?” Eddie says, deflecting, but Richie could not possibly be stopped. Eddie doesn’t need to know about the image of him in a full school boy’s outfit dancing through Richie’s head, that’s all for him.

“Anywhere loud enough,” Bev answers, and it makes Richie stop.

“Loud enough?” he asks, and Bev gives him a cheeky grin.

“Yeah, enough to drown you out.”

Richie scowls at her as Eddie bellows in laughter next to him.

Turns out the club Bev picks, which Eddie approves, of course, after a quick once (or fifty)-over of their website and drink menu, is not *quite* loud enough to drown Richie out, but none of the Losers seem to mind.

Their faces are bright and excited from Moment One, and not for the first time, Richie recalls how little of adult life they have spent together. This might be more young-adult-life, but hey, when you’re partly brain-dead through your twenties and thirties, you have to make your forties count.

The six of them pile into the car Richie calls for them, and Richie hangs back, expecting to shotgun it with their rather scruffy looking driver, but then Eddie squeezes himself in the middle row and makes funny eyes, pointing at the empty space next to him. Richie takes a deep breath and hops on in.

He smashes against Eddie to fit, throwing an arm over Eddie’s shoulder in habit and before he can panic or take it back Eddie leans against it, an easy grin on his face.

The time they had spent getting ready for a night out slowly eked the stress from both of them. Although as Richie feels Eddie’s shape

nestled under his arm, shaking in laughter at Mike's story about how Bill leaves his socks everywhere, it's starting to return with a vengeance. The car swerves through traffic and Eddie tenses when they narrowly avoid a puke-green Mazda, leaning forward and then back against Richie's chest. Richie tries to calm his heart but he's pretty sure Eddie could feel the throbbing from a mile away.

"You've certainly calmed down," Richie says, almost a whisper into Eddie's hair. Turning his head slightly, Eddie shakes his head with a laugh.

"Yeah, playing dress up with Bev actually did help." He dips his head in a bashful smile and Richie closes his eyes. What he wouldn't give to lean in, press a kiss to Eddie's cheek, pull at his shoulder so he could bury his face in Eddie's hair. They're so close, Richie drowns in the smell of Eddie's new cologne, courtesy of Bev, but it suits him, damn her, she knows what she's doing.

Bev fully dressed Eddie for the festivities, and Richie lets himself take it in as they sit in traffic. He doesn't recognize the baby blue button up shirt, cuffs at the sleeves, thin and imperceptible white polka dots that Richie can only see because Eddie's so fucking *close*. The smart black jeans and practical sneakers are a part of the Kaspbrak Collection, curated by your very own Richie Tozier to avoid anymore sexual freak outs during their temporary cohabitation. The jeans are tighter than Richie remembers, his neck going prickly and hot in the small quarters of the car.

Mission failed.

Thankfully, the traffic abates just in time for them to pull up to the club before Richie goes off like a rocket. His leg jiggles as the automatic door slides open, planning to fly out and shake off the arousal like water off a dog, when Eddie wraps a hand around his knee and gives it a small squeeze. Richie's eyes snap up to Eddie's, terrified, but Eddie just smiles and nods. Richie can't smile back, can't really make anything work right, his heart pounding in his ears, and instead lets out some type of high-pitched noise.

Ben slaps a hand against the back of his arm and Richie jumps.

“Get a move on, Trashmouth! The night is young!” Ben points at the now-open door, and Richie gulps down the lump in his throat and climbs out. He takes a few more steps onto the sidewalk than he needs to, closing his eyes and trying to even out his breathing, but he can feel Eddie right behind him. Sure enough, when he opens his eyes and swings around, Eddie beams up at him, still in his space, still so close that Richie could throw his arms out and pull him in, so Richie shoves his hands in the pockets of his jeans and grins back.

“You excited?” he asks, honestly wondering, because Eddie’s smile is the biggest and longest maintained he’s seen since he started therapy. Eddie shrugs playfully, his brown eyes big.

“Maybe. Be nice to let some stuff go,” Eddie says, most of the way to happy, and Richie finds it both intoxicating and surprisingly contagious. Maybe Bev was right - maybe this was best for them, best for Eddie, which is always best for Richie. “I’m also curious.” Eddie bites his lip and Richie grits his teeth.

“Curious?” he gets out, and Eddie gives another adorable shrug.

“Yeah, I’d like to see if any of you can dance.” Richie laughs, some the tension flowing from his shoulders. Eddie pauses like something’s occurring to him. He looks up toward Richie in question. “Can *I* even dance?”

“I’ve never seen it, Eds, but I imagine it would be a *sight* to behold.”

“Fuck off,” Eddie pushes at Richie’s arm with his own, and Richie can’t stop his hands from freeing themselves and reaching out. He grabs Eddie around the wrist, spreading out his arm and gesturing at his middle.

“I’m serious! That lithe little body? You’d dance circles around any of these other Losers.” Eddie laughs and squirms away, still staying sidled against him while Ben finishes paying the driver.

“We’ll see, asshole,” Eddie says, running a hand through his hair. Richie watches the muscles in his arm, the tiny curl of hair that bounces back to rest against his temple.

“Guess we will, Spaghetti,” he agrees, half lost in a flurry of less-than-pure thoughts. Bev approaches in a sparkly tank, a radiant smile like the rest of them. She loops her arm through Eddie’s and kisses his cheek. Richie tries to shift his mind to them, forcing down the image of Eddie’s small and powerful arms and Eddie’s straining neck and Eddie Eddie *Eddie*. Fuck, he needs to get a grip, he hasn’t even had a drink. He laser-focuses on Bev and tries to appear normal, which comes off closer to constipated, until she startles him with a yell.

“Let’s DO this, boys!”

A few strangers look their way, and Bev whispers a rough, “*What?*” before all three of them laugh, a burst of excitement and nerves.

Bev gives Eddie The Look, which Richie knows means he’ll be okay, they’ll all get through this, but Eddie can bow out at any point. Eddie either responds with a shake of the head and a retreat or a safe nod and plows on through. The time, it’s an enthusiastic nod, and Bev smiles up at Richie.

“A little forgetful birdie just told me he’d like to unlock his Dirty Dancing backstory, please and thank you,” Richie stage-whispers to Bev, collecting her free arm in his and initiating a slow skip into the front door of the club. Eddie fumbles the landing, his feet stuck in the pavement.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” he asks, refusing to get a clue and skip along, no matter how many times Bev mimes the motion to get him started.

“Abandon him, Bevy, he’s dragging down our hearty skip!” Bev drops Eddie’s hand on command, and Eddie looks so sad that Richie turns them both mid-skip to trot toward him instead of away. “It means you’re looking to unlock your Secret Dance Powers tonight!”

“Oooh!” Bev squeaks in glee, rubbing her hands together like a dance mother plotting a routine for their previously reluctant daughter whose finally come around. Eddie puts his hands to his hips.

“I said I wanted to see everyone *else* dance, I’ll just observe for now,” he says, and he looks so serious that Richie wants to pinch his cheeks.

“Ah, yes, how very scientific of you, Eds,” he pokes a careful finger at Eddie’s shoulder, the touch still somehow thrilling, happy with the breadcrumbs of how they used to be, “I’m not a big dancer myself, but I hear that’s the first step to a natural: painstaking research.”

“I’ll make a fool of myself!” Eddie cries, actually concerned, and Bev flees to him easily, pressing a hand to the center of his chest and looking him in the eye. Richie steps in behind her. They feel like a team, and Richie realizes they kind of are. Team Bring Eddie Back - Whatever That Means.

“Tonight is for fun, Eds. You don’t have to do anything, just stick close to us and we’ll all enjoy each other’s company,” she tells him, and Eddie sucks in a giant breath. Richie shifts toward them.

“No way you’ll look like a fool with us around, Sp-” Bev whirls around on him, eyes squinted, and Richie catches himself. “Eddie.” Bev nods. “You’ve seen Mike dance when he wins at Basketball for Losers, it’s a fucking *abomination*.” That gets Eddie out of his head, his eyes blinking away the fog of nerves, and Richie feels some pride swell, especially when Bev throws him a smile.

“Oh god, you’re right.” Eddie looks dazed in a different way and this time it makes Richie chuckle. “We need to make sure he doesn’t break a hip tonight.” Both Richie and Bev lose it at that, always delighted when Eddie gets in a good one, doubled over by the time Mike and Bill approach their huddle.

“What’s so funny?” Mike asks and even Eddie can’t help but laugh along with them this time.

As it turns out, there’s a live band inside the modestly-sized club. Bill is for some reason, ecstatic, and they trail in behind him to find a place to sit. One booth in the back fits all six of them comfortably, but Bill is up within seconds to “check out the action” in his own words. Mike shakes his head but follows him, and Richie takes a seat

on the edge of the red vinyl bench. Eddie hesitates, hovering over him. Richie slides in a little and Eddie slips in next to him.

“This round’s on me, Rich, but you’re up next,” Bev yells over the music, and Richie blows her a kiss. He hears Eddie giggle. Not sure how he’s going to survive Eddie with any amount of alcohol in him, Richie takes a breath and leans back against the pillows behind them. Eddie turns to him, fidgeting in his seat.

“Did you wanna go watch the band? I think I might,” he says, a finger crooked toward the mass of people. Richie’s chest constricts at the size of the crowd, reminding him of his last public appearance, where he fumbled together the rest of his set after memories of Derry came flooding back to him. He hadn’t been up on a stage since, but that was for many reasons, like trauma and unnecessary mourning and his formerly dead best friend showing up at his doorstep. Oh, and the fact that he swore he wouldn’t do another show before biting the big one and Coming Out.

Richie told himself he’d start small, and he had. The problem was he’d kept it *too* small, and at this point, the only person he’d really told was Bev and his agent, in a pure state of desperation at trying to explain why he needed some time off. Luckily his royalty checks from voice-work would tide him over for a little while longer, but he felt the pressure anyway. He knew he was gay, he knew he wanted to be with a man, and he knew exactly who that man was. But the concept of telling everyone when that man is now actually *alive*, and has to be told as *well*, had become a little more complicated. It actually felt like starting back at square one.

A song ends and he looks up at Eddie, watching him expectantly, so brave and willing to try new things, and Richie jumps up to join him, follow him into the pit because it’s what he’s always done and always will do.

They weave through lots of strangers until they find their people, Bill and Mike shoulder-to-shoulder near the back. Bill claps Eddie on the shoulder and pulls until he’s standing next to him. Richie breathes a sigh of relief to see ample space around them. He smiles wide at all of them, his heart swelling as the next song starts.

Eddie doesn't really dance, it's more like swaying, but every once in awhile he bumps into Richie, who's doing a lot of the same, so it's pretty good. Mike twirls Bill a few times, dipping him in front of the rest of them, but that's about as exciting as his dance moves get, to all their disappointment. Bev appears with drinks after a few songs, and Richie sips at his slowly, already enjoying the thrill of good music, all of them together, and a happy Eddie, who occasionally looks to him with a giant, goofy grin over his own glass of wine.

That's one of the things they've been able to suss out about him: he prefers white wine. It makes him giggly and flushes his cheeks just a little.

Other things about this-Eddie they know for sure: he's a cat person but is extremely sweet to dogs, he adds salt to everything, long sleeves make him far too warm, his fingers flex when he's nervous (sometimes Richie worries they're longing to grip an inhaler), he's kind with everyone but himself and Richie (but Richie likes it that way), and he's still the bravest man Richie has ever known.

Richie doesn't like to dwell too much on everything that has happened. It's on his mind constantly, but if he gets too lost in the technicalities of what Eddie has gone through, what *all* of them experienced when they lost and then found him, he feels every ounce of air leave his body in a devastating rush. He's been managing at surface level, focusing almost solely on Eddie and the day-to-day. It's a bit of a relief after months of sitting deep in a hole of his own despair, the ability to turn his attention to something else, something unknown and also so familiar. But Eddie is deep in his reality all the time.

Aside from therapy, where he processes and copes and *feels* every single step of the way, he's always facing his own questions head-on in a way that Richie admires. The personification of Eddie is a strong force, and he certainly hasn't lost it. Sometimes, if he tries hard, Richie can pretend none of this is strange. It happens in small moments, absent of intention and full of gut feeling. When Eddie swats at his arm after a joke or smiles with a good morning, when Richie sees all of them together, shoved into a booth around him and breaking enthusiastically (and slightly drunkenly) into a huge plate of nachos. Richie doesn't care why Eddie found his way back to them,

he just cares that it happened at all, so he steals a jalapeno from atop the chip Eddie is crafting for himself and happily chews it right in Eddie's face.

"You're going to regret that, asshole, that shit is spicy," Eddie says, smug yet annoyed, and Richie already feels the sharp burn. Good thing he's got a poker face and a smooth beer in front of him. He takes a large gulp and fakes it until the sting stops. Once they demolish the plate, they head out for another round of swaying-in-a-line, which is now Richie's favorite type of dancing. Plus, the band is actually pretty good, a cross between blues and rock that is right up his very-white and bland alley.

He's sandwiched between Ben and Eddie again, and Eddie's particularly close this time, right in front of him, and he's tipsy enough that his body is free and loose and leaning frequently back against Richie's chest. Richie feels only a slight buzz but he's flying high, every single touch like a shock of adrenaline. His eyes drift over the crowd as the lead guitarist goes on a lengthy solo, and they land on two men dancing together to the right of them. They're clearly a couple, Richie knows it's not just his new Gay Vision, and the taller one has his hands on the shorter one's hips in a way that he doesn't think could read as anything *but* gay. Their bodies move together seamlessly, barely even touching, and then the shorter one smiles over his shoulder at his partner, and Richie's heart does a weird leap. A hand gently lands on his arm.

"Pretty cute, huh?" Ben says into his ear, and Richie's too happy and buzzed and overwhelmed to do anything but nod and take another sip of beer. Ben pats his arm a couple times and they just keep dancing.

When they return to the booth, Richie feels empowered somehow. He feels the courage building from the center of his chest, and he barely has the foresight to wait for all of them to sit down before it's out of his mouth.

"Hey guys, I'm gay," he says, simple and probably pretty loud, based on how Ben jumps while piling in next to him, and he suddenly realizes he screamed it right into his face. Everyone freezes, mouths open, Mike spilling some of his beer onto Bill's thigh, but Bill is stock-

still. Eddie's just hovering on the outside of the table, staring at him.

"That's great, Rich," Bill says, always the leader, and Richie lets out a breath he didn't know he had been holding. The rest of them join him in a chorus of acceptance, and he knew it was coming, but it still blooms a pleasant string of warmth through his chest. Bev gives him a knowing look and he blows her another kiss for good measure.

"We love you, man," Ben says into his ear when they're all done chattering over him, congratulating him, thanking him for being "honest" and "vulnerable," punching at his thigh with a soft fist. Eddie slides into the booth with a soft smile and rosy cheeks.

"We do," he says, eyes on Richie.

Richie's throat jumps under his gaze. It's possible his heart has stopped. Eddie nods as they watch each other, and Richie smiles back at him, fond.

"Thanks, Spaghetti."

Eddie sticks out his tongue.

They make it as late as 1am, and considering Grandpa Hanscom is among them, Bev declares it a win.

She kisses Richie sloppily on the cheek as he and Eddie exit the car.

"You're brave, Tozier," she says, leaving absolutely no room to argue, so Richie doesn't. He just waves goodbye and follows Eddie to the door.

When they make it upstairs, Eddie takes his time puttering anxiously in the kitchen, getting a drink of water, tidying up the counter, until Richie says something.

"So was the night out a success?" he asks, and Eddie laughs, small

but open. "I know I kinda stole the limelight there at the end, but I think it was pretty delightful overall." Eddie kicks a foot out to lean on.

"I'm glad you did, I mean," Eddie starts, not making eye contact, thumbing at the glass in his hand, "I'm glad you told everyone... told us. I'm glad I'm-" he stutters over the words, breath stuck in his throat. Richie leans toward him, still several feet away.

"You're?"

"I'm... your friend. Still, I mean."

"Eddie."

"Even after... it all," he says, finally looking up. His eyes are wide and scared, and Richie takes a step closer to reassure him.

"No matter what, Eds," Richie says, quick and sure.

The silence settles over them for a beat, two broad smiles, two sets of wringing hands between them. Eddie's eyes fall as he huffs out a breath. Richie thinks he can feel the air move in the room.

"What I said before," Eddie says, slowly, "about remembering."

"With the plates," Richie answers, because he doesn't like this topic, but he gave so much of himself tonight and Eddie deserves the same if he wants it.

"Yeah, that. I'm not... sure it matters. I think I'm figuring out who I am, bit by bit, and you guys help so much, I'm not sure... wondering is doing me any good."

Richie shines bright at him, moving forward another step.

"Becky's little prodigy," he says, teasing, and Eddie laughs, so close again. Richie wants to ruffle at his hair, just like he used to when they were kids, and his hand rises and falls all within the span of a second, but Eddie catches him around the wrist.

"You can touch me," Eddie says, his eyes are on the spot where their

hands are joined, Richie's pulse hammering in his palm, and Richie doesn't dare blink or move, "it's okay. I know I used to jump but now it's, it's fine."

"Okay," Richie says in a rush, and his hand comes up to Eddie's jaw, just for a moment, just to calm him, and every muscle in Eddie's body freezes.

"*Shit*," Eddie breathes, both hands pressing into his temples, falling back into the counter behind him.

"Eddie?" Richie stands in front of him, panicked. Eddie's eyes are squeezed shut, his hands now in fists, his teeth gritted.

"Richie, *fuck*," he swears, beginning to gasp, "I fucking, I threw the... but, Jesus, you," Richie tries to follow along, pressing in close, and tears start to run down Eddie's face, "You saw it. You know. My chest." He clutches at his scar, like he does when he's had too much, and Richie wonders if this is the most it's ever been.

It takes a few long minutes, huddled, breathing together. Richie rubs a hand slowly up and down Eddie's arm, and when he's no longer hyperventilating, he stares up miserably into Richie's eyes.

"I remember the sewers."

The next day, in the bright light of an early Saturday afternoon, a mostly-hungover group of Losers convene back in what could be considered their new adult clubhouse: Richie's living room.

All of them are clutching mugs of coffee, except Eddie, who opted for non-cafeinated tea, still hopped up from crashing face-first into a memory. Richie knows he barely slept the night before, because Richie didn't get a wink either, and he could hear Eddie pacing from across the hall. Richie had considered checking on him several times, and even got up a few of those times, but always nixed it in the end, wanting to give him his space.

Bev sits next to Eddie on the couch, blanket hanging over her shoulders. It's a stuffy 76 degrees inside but she insists it's part of her hangover routine, so Richie only makes three jokes about it and then lets it go.

Eddie's been talking for almost ten minutes, spinning a tale the rest of them know well, and it feels too much like reliving it. When he recalls leaning over Richie to shake him awake, hoping the deadlights hadn't gotten him, Richie leaves to refill his coffee. The pot shakes in his hand so he immediately puts it back down, swallowing against the rise of acid in his throat.

He's tried for months to forget the events of that night. None of them have talked about it, and now Richie realizes that probably wasn't the best way to process. It's possible the rest of them have discussed it, but Richie could never stomach it. Hearing it all pouring from Eddie's mouth, his *first* memory, feels like some sort of fucked up karma. He steels himself and moves back toward Eddie's voice.

"I must've blacked out after that," he finishes, exhaling heavily. Bev pats at his knee and wipes a tear away.

"That about sums it up," she says, and Ben coughs out a pained sob. Richie comes up behind him to place a warm hand on his back, an anchor while he cries. Ben turns toward him bodily, sweeping him into a hug, and Richie quickly sets his mug down and wraps his arms around him in return.

"I'm so sorry, Rich, I didn't-"

"Hey, man," Richie stops him, his chest tight, "cut it out. You were getting me out of there." Ben pulls away, face red.

"I know, but you wanted to get him out, too, and I didn't... I really didn't think he was-"

"We all thought he was gone, Ben, don't blame yourself," Mike says, standing next to where Bill is in the recliner with his head in his hands. Mike presses a hand to the nape of Bill's neck, rubs a soothing line across his shoulders. Bill looks up, grateful, tears in his eyes, then shifts his focus to Eddie.

"We're so s-s-ssorry we left you down there, Eddie," Bill says, voice broken, and Eddie frantically shakes his head at the notion.

"I don't blame any of you for anything," he says, clutching at Bev. "I was down there with you, it could have been any of us. I threw that thing to save all of us, to save-" He looks to Richie, whose heart skips a beat. "I knew what I was doing."

"Have I told you how lucky we are to have you back, Eds?" Bev says, flipping up the edge of her blanket to tuck it half over Eddie, too. "I think I've mentioned it before, but just in case you needed the reminder." She smiles at him and he returns it, and Richie knows they're talking about something so fucking heavy and sad, but he also feels *really* fucking lucky.

"Do you-d-do you remember anything else? B-b-before that?" Bill asks, Mike's hand still resting at the base of his neck. Eddie looks thoughtful for a moment, then slowly shakes his head.

"No, it's like, it's like there's no context. It's one glimpse and some of the feelings." Eddie watches his hands as he talks, and Richie waits with bated breath. "I remember how I felt about all you guys. That's really the clearest thing." Richie's heart clenches at how badly he wants to cry. A cold sweat breaks over his body and Eddie keeps looking to him, which cracks him open a little wider.

"You remember telling me you fucked my mom?" Richie manages, and the shocked burst of laughter from the room is almost worth the suffocating pain in his chest. Eddie rubs at his eyes and smiles, hollowed out and exhausted.

"Fuck, *yeah*, I actually do..." he says, only a little ashamed, his smile going wide as he remembers. He could get used to that look on Eddie's face. Richie bounces on his feet.

"Real glad those weren't your last words after all, pal," Richie says. Eddie blushes, still smiling up at him. Everyone relaxes into the release of pressure, relieved to be laughing at Richie, familiar and comfortable in his deflection. Richie feels the waves of emotion pulling at him, abating minute by minute, and he listens to the room settle while he and Eddie watch each other.

“Me too,” Eddie finally answers, and Bev hums in agreement.

That night, Richie falls asleep easily enough, but it doesn't keep.

It's fresh in his mind, he can't escape it. He can almost feel the spray of Eddie's blood hit his face. Droplets in his vision while Eddie is pleading then pulled away. When he wakes, he knows he's crying, and it takes a second to realize he's also screaming.

Eddie flies through his door and Richie screams again, this time awake, and Eddie screams back, startled and confused.

“Jesus, what!?” Eddie yells. Richie's worried he's having a panic attack.

“You, what! You're the one in my room!”

“You were screaming! I'm here to help!”

“Well then you should probably stop screaming!” Richie screams, just to prove his point. The neighbors with the stupid baby cross his mind but then Eddie is moving toward the bed. Richie grabs for his glasses and puts them on while Eddie sits at the foot of the mattress. Richie can't help but jump, just a little, because he just woke from a horrific nightmare to do nothing but scream for almost a full minute.

“I'm sorry,” Eddie starts, his voice steady and much quieter, “I heard you from my room and didn't think before busting in here. I just got so scared.” He's staring at the floor, and Richie is glad because his legendary poker face is failing him. It's late, he's tired and devastated and Eddie is sitting on his *bed*, not rotting away underground, and he suddenly worries that *this* is the dream. So he sits up and catches his breath, his legendary wit failing him even worse.

Eddie turns to look at him.

“Uh, you okay? Do, do you need me to leave?” he asks, sheepishly,

and Richie reaches out a hand even though Eddie's too far to grab. It just hangs in the air.

"No, no, *shit*. Sorry," Richie says, very aware he is shirtless now that he's out from under his sheet, and he sees Eddie's eyes flit over him. "It's okay. You just scared the ever-loving *shit* out of me, I need a minute." He presses a hand to his chest, his heart still fluttering.

"Sorry, sorry, I know."

"You apologize more now," Richie says, not thinking.

"Oh," Eddie says. It sounds like a gut punch. Richie scoots toward him on the bed, this time actually close enough to grab at his arm. Eddie doesn't flinch, and Richie remembers he has permission now, but it still feels tentative.

"I'm sorry, Eds, fuck, that was not-"

"No, it's okay."

"Not really, but that's what I do," Richie breathes, sick of himself. Eddie shifts to put one knee up on the bed, and Richie's hand falls from his arm.

"Do what?" Eddie asks. Richie tangles his hands together. One touch per interaction is probably reasonable. He sighs.

"Talk. Make jokes. Say stupid things." Eddie pauses, letting that settle between them for a moment.

"Well, yeah, you do do those things," he finally agrees, and Richie pinches at both of his Eddie's knees, *quota be damned*, because it makes Eddie screech in a truly disturbing way that brings Richie a little further back to Earth.

"Thanks." Richie laughs, too tired and sad to poke further. Eddie laughs back, quiet and real, the kind that makes Richie glow inside.

"We all have our things, right?" Eddie says, eyes back down on the floor. Richie nods, stunned, until Eddie looks back at him and asks, "do you have nightmares a lot?" Now Richie's the one to look away.

“Uh,” he groans, trying to get his brain back online. “I used to. Haven’t in a while.”

“Yeah, me too,” Eddie answers, quick, like he was waiting.

“And now?”

Eddie shrugs, says, “yeah,” and Richie feels like crying.

“You wanna talk?” he asks, half-hoping Eddie will turn him down, but when Eddie shakes his head, it’s not relief that swoops through him.

“Sometime, not now. Still tough to think about.” Eddie frowns, picking at a loose thread on Richie’s sheets. They both watch him in silence, and the time stretches out between them. Richie’s stuck on a thought, one he’s had since Eddie collapsed on the floor of his kitchen, and he finds it impossible to contain now that they’re alone, speaking their secrets into the dark.

“What, uh, what made you remember?” he asks, tempting fate, and probably his heart, because he’s not sure it will be able to handle the answer. Eddie’s eyes meet his and Richie knows his suspicions were true.

“Your hand-” Eddie says, bringing a hand up to his own cheek, “your hand on my face, like before we-before we went in. Down to the sewers.”

“You remember that?”

“Your speech?” Eddie says, and Richie laughs.

“My speech, yeah.”

“Yeah, of course. It’s where-” he stops, swallowing, shifting on the bed, “it’s where my memory starts.”

Richie goes cold all over. Eddie had started his story in such a nebulous way earlier with everyone, saying he remembered climbing down the ladder. He didn’t mention anything about his conversation with Richie.

“Rich?” Eddie reaches out, his hand grabbing at Richie’s bare shoulder. Richie jumps again, and Eddie pulls back, always patient and considerate.

“Yeah, yeah, I’m fine, you just didn’t say. Before.”

“Yeah, sorry,” he says, then rolls his eyes when Richie tuts at him, “whatever, anyway. Just thought it was, it was for us. You know?” Eddie looks him dead in the eye. Richie crosses his arms, suddenly feeling desperate and in danger of taking advantage.

Richie wants Eddie to have a safe and secure re-entry into the world, and so far he’s been able to control himself. Some friendly touches are fine, but he’s trying so *fucking* hard not to cross any lines. Eddie doesn’t need to be further confused, already no idea who he is, married to someone he has yet to meet and just taking time to figure out what he wants. Richie doesn’t need to fuck up his healing process by doing something stupid. Like, for instance, kissing him in the dark quiet of his bedroom after waking from a nightmare to Eddie literally sprinting in to rescue him.

He nods. Before he can do anything else, Eddie stands up. Richie’s mouth opens to protest, but Eddie beats him to the punch.

“Anyway, are you good?” Eddie says, a little scrambled, and Richie feels thrown. He nods again.

“Yeah, I’m-I’m fine.” They watch each other, and Richie is itching out of his skin. “Get outta my room, Kaspbrak,” he says, plastering on a fake grin and giving Eddie an out before he needs one. Safer bet, he figures. Eddie shifts on his feet, then heads to the door.

“Sure, yeah. Uh, good night, Richie.” He taps at the door frame a few times, and exits into the hallway, his eyes cloudy with something.

Richie collapses back onto his pillows, throwing an arm over his eyes.

Memories start coming back pretty regularly after that first one. Some in therapy, some in the comfort of the apartment. Sometimes Eddie's alone, sometimes with Richie, and sometimes with all the Losers. Nothing as intense as the first time, but Eddie is always a bit dizzy and nauseated during and after, and Becky gives him some good tips on how to handle the process once they begin likening it to a panic attack. Grounding techniques, soothing behaviors, how those around him can help and how to signal if he wants help or not. Richie memorizes their little check-list of suggestions and takes every episode in stride. Over the next few weeks, they start handling everything a little bit better, even if it's never *good*.

It also means Richie is touching Eddie a *lot*.

Eddie lets slip one time, the time he remembers the leper chasing him at the Neibolt house, a triangle of red balloons and a clown, that Richie's hand on his back or gripping at his shoulder or wrapped around his arm is the fastest way to bring him back to reality. Richie tries not to spontaneously combust when he finds out, making a note to tease him later about it and another, more important note to *always be touching Eddie* .

Now when Eddie's breathing picks up or his muscles tense, Richie is always there, right behind him, a gentle reminder that he's going to be okay, that they've got this. It's become second nature to reach out for Eddie. Richie doesn't pretend it isn't mutually beneficial. He's fully aware he probably looks like a lovesick puppy most of the time he's walking Eddie through a recovery moment, but when he's lost in it, when Eddie needs him, he could fucking care less.

But people are definitely starting to notice the extra touching thing. And Richie may not be a subtle person, but his friends could give him a run for his money.

He's squished next to Eddie on Bill and Mike's love seat, attending their pathetic housewarming party, complete with no appetizers or party games, which Richie *always* wins, and it makes everyone else furious. He's in the middle of pulling together a theory about the rest of them plotting to foil his supreme winning streak when all of Eddie's muscles go tight against him. Richie's hand quickly finds the nape of Eddie's neck, rubbing down slowly over his spine and back

up when he still doesn't relax at the first sign of a touch.

Leaning forward, he keeps his voice low and close to Eddie's ear.

"Y'okay, bud?" he says, and Eddie blinks once, giving his head a shake. Richie feels gradual breathing stretch out Eddie's lungs, ribs expanding under his hand.

"Yeah, just," Eddie clears his throat, gesturing to the room where all the Losers are meandering about, "overwhelming at first. When we're all together." Richie nods, patting gently at his back.

"Indeed, my good sir, these fellows are a *lot*—"

"Please don't do the British one."

"-but they're some of the finest-ow!" Richie stops, hissing in pain when Eddie smacks his knee, hard.

"Stop it," Eddie says, eyeing him. "Don't pretend like you're not also freaking out." Richie fidgets in his seat.

"Mmmnggh," he babbles, not wanting to deal with it, but still pulls out his phone to check for any missed calls. Nothing.

His agent said he'd get back to him within the day about his newly-pitched Netflix special. Eddie encouraged him to do it, always in his corner, and Richie was filled with some sort of stupid optimism about being out and having Eddie believe in him, so he called Brett and they had talked for almost an hour. Besides being excited to hear from him at all, Brett seemed at least mildly enthusiastic and Richie tried not to feel too stupid while explaining his idea about a forty year old's coming of age, but like, funny.

Richie falls back against the couch, jiggling his hand over Eddie's spine, both of them vibrating with nervous energy. Bev walks up from behind them, a wry smile on her face.

"I swear, we all come in twos now," she says, sipping at a mimosa.

"What?" Eddie asks. The hair stands at the back of Richie's neck.

“You know. Now that these two knuckleheads are living together, it’s like all of us have a pair.” Bev points at them on the loveseat. Neither Richie nor Eddie has a response to that, but Eddie’s eyes find Mike and Bill standing in the kitchen. His mouth works at something, but Richie is stuck on Bev. She quirks an eyebrow at him. He narrows his eyes at her, trying for whatever expression means *shut the fuck up now*. Luckily, Eddie seems oblivious, watching Bill and Mike explain how they made a pie from scratch to an unwitting Ben.

Richie laughs, a loud and awkward noise.

“Do we have a schedule for rotation? Cause I-” he stops, his phone lit up with a call from his agent. He throws a hand up, hip-checking Eddie in the shoulder when he stands and almost dropping his phone before finally answering it. He ducks into the hall so as not to bother anyone else, and Eddie’s eyes follow him.

“Hey man,” Brett says into his ear, the sounds of a party loud in the background. “They went for it, Richie.” Richie does a stupid fist pump, closing the door on one of the bedrooms he’s wandered into.

“That’s great! The whole coming out thing worked for them?” Relief spreads over him, and he’s actually kind of proud of himself, and really excited to tell Eddie. Brett laughs, short and fake.

“Yeah, they called it your ‘Ellen Special.’” He laughs again, but Richie recoils.

“I hate that. Please don’t ever say that to me again,” he spits. He’d rather not come out and be immediately compared to Ellen, but Brett’s still cackling in his ear, so he hopes no one else would take it seriously. He has been told he has the cheekbones of a lesbian, but that’s where he’d like the parallels to begin and end.

Richie asks him a few more questions, getting the play-by-play of the meeting. Brett cuts him off after ten minutes.

“Look, relax. It’s all good, Rich. We’ll talk more on the 25th?” Richie agrees and bids him goodbye, shaking off the Ellen thing and ready to tell Eddie that even without his memory, he’s still usually right.

He exits the bedroom, his chest puffing with pride, when he catches a glimpse of Eddie and Bev together on the love seat. Bev's taken over Richie's spot at Eddie's side, and she, too, is running a hand along his shoulder. Their heads are ducked together, whispering, and Richie stops, worried he's interrupting something. Bev hears him and startles gently, tapping at Eddie's shoulder to turn him around. When he does, he looks sad and worried, but smiles up at Richie anyway.

"Was that your agent?" Eddie asks, and suddenly Richie's whole special seems stupid compared to what Eddie is going through. Whatever happened that made him look so tired and sullen.

"Yeah, yeah. They-they were pretty excited about it, actually."

Eddie's eyes light up, and Richie can't help but grin back at him. Bev looks between them.

"Am I missing something here?" she asks, just as Mike, Bill and Ben approach. Richie takes them all in, but Eddie can't help himself.

"Richie's got an upcoming Netflix special," he says, and Richie squeaks. He hadn't anticipated telling everyone all at once, but that seems to be how he breaks news in his life these days. Having a big group of friends is still an adjustment for him at times, and it's something he and Eddie bond over. But they all love him, full of cheering and clapping and kind words. And when he walks back over to Eddie, they plop down together on the love seat, Eddie's hand around his knee and Richie's arm around his shoulders.

"I knew you'd get it," Eddie says, his eyes serious. Richie rolls his eyes but the praise settles nicely in his gut, his knee tingling under Eddie's touch.

They both look back out to the rest of the room, where they find Bill staring. When he doesn't stop, Richie waves.

"You memorizing the lines of my handsome face, Denbrough?" he asks. Eddie sits up stiffly. Looking slightly caught, Bill laughs and clears his throat.

"Sorry," he says, smiling small and sad at them, "just proud of you,

Richie.” Richie’s face flushes, already wanting rid of the attention, at least this sincere and sweet type that he’s not sure what to do with.

“Thanks,” he answers, quiet and pleased, but Eddie’s stock-still. Bill swirls his drink, some whiskey mixer Mike made for tonight, and Richie feels like he missed something important while he was on the phone.

“You’re g-g-going for what you want,” Bill says, looking to the kitchen, where Bev, Ben and Mike are chatting animatedly. Richie thinks for a second.

“Yeah, I-it was hard, coming back from Derry. Having to combine that version of myself I left here and the one I found there,” he says, the words coming from somewhere deep inside, someplace that was longing for someone to understand, and he sees Eddie turn to listen.

“I didn’t know if they would be the same people. If I could still do this, this whole comedy thing. Was that just the miserable me? The one who needed someone to tell him what to say, how to feel, what he thought? Cause I sure as shit didn’t have any interest in that.” He laughs, but it’s painful, the unpleasant burn of his old life slowly crawling back. “But now, with all of us, I think I’m starting to see things more clearly. Figure out what’s really important.” He looks to Eddie, his hand longing to reach forward and touch. “And if I can put that into my comedy, and fuck, get paid, I guess, then, well. I guess why not throw myself fully into giving it a shot? What the fuck else am I gonna do?”

Richie’s never been good at talking about his emotions, but he’s always been good at talking a blue streak. Apparently, combining the two doesn’t come too difficult, he just needs a little schmaltsy encouragement.

Eddie turns back to face Bill, and the two of them share a look. Richie moves to palm at the small of Eddie’s back, and is pretty sure he’s not imagining Eddie leaning back into the touch.

“Wanna pal around for the day, Eds?” Bev asks, and both Richie and Eddie lift their heads from their bowls of cereal to stare at her.

“What?” Eddie says, and Richie nods, agreeing. Bev laughs at the both of them from across the kitchen table.

“Get out of the house? We can get some coffee, some lunch, go to the farmer’s market, I’m basically in this for the food,” she says, and Richie barks a laugh, even though this day sounds like no fun for him. It’s 9am on a Saturday and they had been lamenting whether to continue watching *The Good Place* or start the new Zelda game. This third option was not in the cards. Unfortunately, Eddie looks like he’s considering it, and Richie scowls.

“I’m not invited on this boring little Saturday food fest?” Richie asks, attempting a cute pout. Bev shakes her head.

“Not with that attitude,” she says, then points at Eddie, “plus he needs some Tozier-free time. You’ve kept him prisoner a little too long.” Eddie hums beside him.

“She’s got you there, Rich,” he agrees, waggling his eyebrows, and Richie decides he doesn’t like being on the flip-side of *that* move. It seems he’s created a monster.

“Well fiiiiine,” Richie starts, slurping coffee loudly from his mug, “go ahead. Leave me be. I’ll just sulk here alone with my writing.”

Bev shoves gently at his shoulder, grabbing her phone on the counter.

“I found a cafe around here that’s really cute, and I know you love croissants because you’ve come back pretentious this time.” She winks in Eddie’s direction.

Eddie scoffs but his cheeks are pink. Bev always makes Eddie laugh, makes him feel good about himself, giggle with confidence, and Richie fucking loves it. Loves her. Loves them both so much it makes his stomach hurt. He’s glad they’re taking a day together, glad Eddie

has someone he feels comfortable spending time with. But he doesn't have to admit any of that, so he keeps on pouting.

"I *love* croissants!" Richie says in a Southern drawl. Eddie smacks his other shoulder. He's getting quite a beating, and all before noon.

"You do *not*, I know that much. All that bread puts you to sleep."

Richie chokes on the comeback on the tip of his tongue. The simple fact of Eddie knowing him so well squeezes at his heart, and instead, he just smiles into another sip of coffee and kicks at Eddie's shin under the table. Eddie glares at him and stands up, gathering their bowls together to put in the sink. The overwhelming domesticity of it all suddenly feels like a vice around Richie's throat. He goes numb, watches Eddie walk away, drums his fingers against his thigh just to feel something. He focuses on breathing while Bev watches him, tucking her phone into her pocket.

"You gonna be okay here alone, Rich?" she asks, and he nods, needing them to leave now so he can freak out. He feels the panic prickling at the edge of his fingertips, the weight on his chest that usually leads to crying. Reaching for his phone in his pocket, he tells himself he'll call Mike when he's alone, and that calms him enough to bid Eddie and Bev goodbye.

Mike doesn't pick up as fast as Bev does, but he's a close second. Bill always sends him to voicemail and it's a real dick move.

"What's up, Rich?" Mike sounds serious, and Richie feels regret smack him across the face, but he plows on.

"*Hey*," he breathes, hand on his chest, trying and failing to remember all of Eddie's panic attack techniques because he never thought he'd have to use them himself.

When the pause stretches too far, Mike tries again. "You okay over there?" Richie nods, then realizes Mike can't see him.

"Yeah, yeah, *yeah*, I'm fine, I just realized I'm fucking *living* with Eddie," he says, all of it coming out in a rush, "he does our dishes and we binge watch television shows and talk about character

development and eat dinner together and compliment the ingredients and I'm trying to write my fucking Netflix thing and it's kinda hard not to make it all about him because *everything* 's been about him lately and it's been really fucking *good*, and I need help. Help me here, Mike, cause this is all crashing-"

"Stop. Please god, stop it, I'm on my way and then you can yell at me all you want. Just give me twenty minutes." Mike hangs up and Richie actually loves that, how matter-of-fact he can be, but now it's all hitting him it won't stop, and he glares at the clock of the stove until it ticks up one minute.

It does that twenty four more times before Mike is knocking on his door. Richie forces it open and the burst of air actually helps. Mike's face does, too, all pinched and sad, and Richie will never get over people actually *caring* about him. Driving to see him, dealing with him ranting and raving about how even though some things seem to be falling into place, those things still sometimes scare him the most.

All the Losers had boundary talks when they got back together, when they all decided to scope out this life of helping Eddie and healing as a unit instead of a spread out faction around the country. They each needed their own space, but they also needed each other. Each of them knew the other could say no, could take a step back with no hard feelings. And that's how they know the power woven into saying yes.

Mike steps into the apartment and Richie lets him.

"Okay, let's take it one step at a time. What happened?" Mike asks, and Richie leads him into the living room because he very suddenly needs to sit down.

"I don't *know*, man, we were eating breakfast and Bev wanted to take Eddie out for the day and suddenly he was cleaning up after me and I began spiraling into some sort of existential hole of *dread* -"

"Bev took Eddie out?" Mike says, and Richie stops, hands spread in front of him, and nods.

"Yeah, they're doing some sort of weird, small food tour of the four

blocks around the apartment,” Richie says, and Mike watches him. It’s only now that he sees how good Mike looks, well-slept and vibrant. He’s been looking better every single time they see each other, smile lines wider, his laughter easier to come by. Richie wonders if the same is true of him, cause that’s how he feels. Well, except today, today is obviously a fluke.

“Is all this panic ‘cause Eddie is out in the world without you?” Mike says, looking him straight in the eye, because he’s so genuine and intense. It scares the shit out of Richie, but it’s obviously what he thought he needed. Damn his minute ability to be self-serving sometimes.

“No, *no*, I don’t think so,” Richie sighs, throwing his hands up, and Mike goes back to looking thoughtful. “It’s not like I don’t know we need alone time. We’re grown men, and this has all been a wild fucking ride.”

“Maybe you should do a bit on healthy relationships in your show,” Mike deadpans, and it shocks a laugh out of Richie. They laugh together, and it feels just like what Richie needed.

“Yeah, yeah, thanks for the tip, dude.” He scrubs a hand over his face. “Sometimes it just feels like we’re in this place... this stable, comfortable place,” Richie starts, his mouth sticking around the words, but he deserves to figure this out. Sometimes he thinks Becky therapizes him through osmosis. “But then I remember that place isn’t real. That I don’t know if he’s in that place.” Richie can’t meet Mike’s eyes, too wide open, too honest. He hasn’t told anyone but Bev about his “thing” around Eddie, his “thing” around being hopelessly and head-over-heels in love with every single version of Eddie that exists.

“I think I know what you mean,” Mike says, and Richie finally looks up to see him trying to keep a smile off his face. “So maybe you should... talk to him?” Richie scoffs.

“And say what?”

“Everything you just said to me?”

It can't possibly be that easy.

"It's too much," Richie says, and Mike shakes his head, but his words are more patient.

"We all want to protect him, Rich."

Richie feels all his walls thrown up at once, wants to avoid and crack a joke and move on. But Mike can see through him, can see through all of them. He's the only one who's had thirty years of perspective on all this shit.

"I don't want to add to it. To-" Richie gestures, as if the loop his hands make can encapsulate this whole experience, "to all of this. To everything he's got to deal with." Mike smiles, but he looks sad. Richie's so used to that reaction it almost feels comforting.

"You know better than I do what's between the two of you. But don't underestimate him."

Richie sits on that for a long moment, and then feels like a total dick for taking up every ounce of emotional energy in the room. Mike doesn't look like he minds, but he never looks like he minds, and that's part of his problem.

"Enough about me, Mikey, tell me about life on your side of the pond."

"Pond?" Mike quirks a brow, but already looks amused.

"Pond, highway, whatever," he waves a hand, and soaks in Mike's laughter. "I really just wanna know how bunking up with Bill is going."

Mike looks shy at that, and Richie begins to wonder if he's missing something.

"It's good, it's going well," he says, but it sounds like a stock answer Bill's typed out for him on that stupid, ancient typewriter he insists on using like he's writing his novels in an abandoned, haunted cabin in up northern Maine. "No existential freak-outs."

“The bar’s that low, huh?” Richie asks, and Mike shrugs, chuckling.

“I’ll take what I can get.”

Richie knows the feeling.

Eddie returns from his adventure with an extra blueberry muffin and clenched fists, full of determination.

Richie steals the muffin and waits around for the determination to hit.

Luckily, he’s gotten a jump on things. After catching a glimpse of their little conversation at Bill and Mike’s party, Richie knows Bev is an emotional guidepost for Eddie. He’d be naive to think they didn’t do some deep discussing, especially after his own panic-and-process session with Mike this morning. So he took Mike’s advice and skipped out to the store, got some things to throw together a quick and dirty dinner which he will use as an opportunity to have an actual *adult* conversation about whatever is happening between him and Eddie.

There’s no way he could prepare exactly what to say. After all, he’s never been very good at planning. But the intention is there. The pure-hearted intention of avoiding further panic attacks and getting them a little closer to being on the same page. He isn’t sure he wants Eddie on the page covered with little heart doodles of their names together, but close to there. Almost there.

Some foreshadowing, at the very least.

Richie pops the extra muffin in the fridge and ushers Eddie into his seat at the kitchen table.

“Dinner will be ready in five, but first,” Richie says, throwing a napkin made of actual fabric over Eddie’s lap, “tell me about your day.”

Eddie is quiet for a minute. Richie pulls the salmon and asparagus from the oven and waits, pretending he's focusing on dishing out equal portions.

"It was, it was a good day. A good idea to get out. You're making *dinner*?" he finally says, and Richie laughs. It warms him in a way twenty minutes in the kitchen never could, and he hates that he missed Eddie after six hours apart.

"Don't sound so surprised."

"Oh, I'm not surprised, I'm scared."

Richie snorts, and Eddie adjusts the napkin over his lap, as if Richie did it wrong, which knowing him, he probably did.

"Yeah, yeah, well, fuck you too, this is better than any *croissant* you've had today."

"What even is it? Fish?"

"Wow, where did you go to culinary school? Paris?" Richie turns to face him, bulging his eyes in faux-curiosity and wonder.

"Fuck off," Eddie says, smiling. Richie spoons the grains onto each plate and wipes his hands off on his apron. He found one in the closet and had to wear it, just to complete the full transformation into his mother. It's a bright red, really fucking ugly thing, but Eddie keeps staring at him, and he doesn't care if it's the vibrant color or something else, because like Mike said, he'll take what he can get.

He places a full plate in front of Eddie and sits across from him, fork already in his hand to dive in. Subsisting only on Captain Crunch until Mike left, his stomach's been rumbling since his eyes landed on the box of mixed grains at the store, and they looked like the blandest shit *ever*, which is how he knew Eddie would love them. Eddie's halfway through his third spoonful when Richie finally breaks.

"You are way too predictable." Eddie stops, mouth full of Richie's cooking. Richie grins at him. "Anyway, don't change the subject. Your day. Go."

"I told you, it was good! We had chocolate dipped croissants and really creamy lentil soup and Bev let me Google the history of every building, so yeah. Good day."

"That sounds nerdy *and* delicious, Eds."

Eddie takes another bite. "That's kind of what I'm going for in life, I think."

Richie gets that swirly, constricted feeling in his throat again. He pushes it down, sucking a slow breath through his nose and forging on. Be honest.

"Hey, I think maybe we should have a, uh, conversation or something," he says, words like cement poured over his tongue. Eddie stops to stare at him again, and he takes that as a cue to continue. "Just how things are going. How you're doing."

It feels like a cop-out, but Richie doesn't want to push too hard. Eddie swallows what's in his mouth and puts his fork down.

"Yeah, sure, that makes sense," Eddie says, and wipes at his lips with his napkin. "Becky actually. Well, she suggested we talk, just, one on one."

"Don't we do that a lot?" Richie says, breaking apart a piece of salmon to fit it into his mouth, his defenses going up.

"I mean, yeah." Eddie looks confused, then catches himself. "But... wait. This was y-"

"Sorry, sorry. It's a habit," Richie swears at himself and calms his heart. "Becky's right, as per usual, go on." That earns him a smile from Eddie, and this time his heart flutters in a totally different way.

"She has some good ideas, dickwad," Eddie says, back to all pointed looks and frowns. Richie wants to pinch his cheeks. "All I'm saying is there's, well. I wanted to just clarify one thing." He stops there, and so does Richie's breathing, because if Eddie beats him to the punch he might just pass out. Again. But in his defense, it's been a few months since his last fainting spell.

“Clarify?”

“Yeah. I wanted to know if you’re waiting on me.” Eddie watches him, expects an answer to that, and Richie just squints.

“I’m gonna need more clarifying on my end,” Richie says, his meal forgotten. And after spending a whole forty-five minutes and minimal energy and thought on it.

“If you’re waiting on the old me. Expecting me-well, him. Back.” Eddie’s eyes are so soft on him, so full of wide-eyed innocence mixed with a true and real fear that he’ll be turned down. Richie doesn’t know how he could even ask that, but then he thinks maybe he hasn’t shown Eddie enough just how truly glad he is to have him, any him, filling up his life in a way he didn’t know was possible.

Richie clears his throat and opens his mouth. All that comes out is a strangled groan, so he clears it again and gives it another shot.

“Sorry, uh.”

“This was your idea,” Eddie says, like it’s something that’s worth reminding Richie of.

“You already said that, but-”

“I did not, you cut me off.”

“Okay, that doesn’t matter,” Richie says, halfway to a yell because he just needs to get it *out*, “my answer is no, Eds, big ol’ N-O in giant, glittery, gay letters because I’m trying to use that word more, but no. No way in hell, not a second thought, don’t even need to think about it.”

Eddie presses his lips together in a line. Richie’s glad he pre-poured them each a glass of white wine because he chugs his in one fluid gulp. They don’t talk for what feels like hours, but it actually amounts to around thirty seconds. Richie tries to hoist his heart back up from his feet.

“You seem so excited when I remember,” Eddie says, voice small and quiet, and Richie cradles the empty glass against his chest.

"I am, I mean. I want you to figure this out. I want you to be *happy*, Eddie."

"So you don't wish I was-"

"No."

They lock eyes and hold that between them.

Richie wants to ask how he found him. How he woke up, how he looked him up, how it felt to be alone and abandoned, how it feels to know the closest people in his life left him there, but then, he's afraid he already knows. He's not sure he wants that clarified quite yet. He's always assumed Eddie will tell him when he's ready, just like he does everything else.

Eddie cautions another bite, only a few left on his plate. Richie tries to take another drink before remembering he needs more. He feels the need to make sure Eddie knows he's sure before he gets up to refill his glass.

"Having you back in my life is the best thing that's happened to me in awhile," he says, towering above Eddie at the table, and Eddie's shoulders relax. "Maybe ever. You're-"

"You don't have to, Richie, I didn't mean to put you on the spot," Eddie says, but Richie puts a hand up.

"My idea, remember?"

Eddie thinks for a moment, and Richie just stands there, grinning like a dope, trying not to be disappointed in himself and Eddie's question.

"Why did *you* want to talk?" Eddie asks, and Richie wishes he was looking away, will never be that brave, and he thinks of Mike's advice and also how much Eddie trusts him. It's not like he truly thought Eddie would ever return his feelings, especially not with everything going on. But for one brief second, one moment between breaths, he considered the possibility that Eddie was going to usurp him. That he would fall into Richie's arms, desperately in love, bursting with affection and kisses and blowjobs and the like. That all

of Richie's dreams may come true in a painfully simple way, devoid of any work on Richie's end to help it into fruition.

Instead, he takes a breath and laughs, walls closing in around him. Eddie just sits there and waits, fork in his hand, one bite left on his plate.

"No reason, man," Richie says, putting all his might, which isn't much, into sounding nonchalant. "Becky's got us both wrapped around her little finger. When I'm feeling the need for daily check-ins you know things have gone too far," he scoffs, and Eddie finally takes a drink of his wine.

Richie drains his second glass almost as quickly as the first and ignores the look Eddie shoots his way. He doesn't need pity right now. He needs to punch Mike for recommending honesty to the most emotionally constipated person he knows.

He also needs more booze.

This time it's Bill who suggests they all take a night out, which is becoming more of a common occurrence now that they're all living so close. It's basically what he imagined for his life when he was a kid, totally naive and blissfully unaware that life isn't one long episode of a sitcom, where your friends all live in an isolated clump of apartments in a big city, no locked doors, dinner together every night. Life now isn't too far off, and Richie likes to set aside the fact that they're all here to help Eddie through his trauma and focus on the fact that he rarely goes two days without seeing his friends, at least one by one, and sometimes all together.

It makes dealing with Stan's death a little easier, too.

At first, they didn't talk much about it. Stan's letters had stung in the best way, and Richie could barely breathe around the loss of Eddie, much less dig into the deep feelings of grief around Stan. Having

Eddie back meant an ease of a lot of the complications, immediately replaced by brand new ones, but Richie finds all of them talking about Stan a lot more with Eddie around. Whether it's because they want Eddie to know him in any way he can, or because he's entwined into every single memory they have of each other, their eyes glow with kind words and remembrances and sometimes tears, constantly glancing around for validation that they're only able to find within the rest of the group.

Memories of Stan don't come easy to Richie, not that they do to anyone. But speaking them aloud is acknowledging their existence in a way that makes Richie want to tear his skin off. Eddie's not-death dropped him into a hole he couldn't possibly avoid because he was suddenly *drowning* in self-realization and a whole mess of feelings. But Stan stayed safe, tucked in the past, no vision of him as a tortured adult back to confront his childhood. Richie could keep him away, keep that at bay.

He's not stupid, he knows that internal pang when Bev brings up the way Stan's hair used to curl out of his yarmulke or when he and Eddie bicker and he can practically hear Stan chiding them to *shut the fuck up and kiss already* means he misses him, an ache he knows all too well, but still isn't ready to fully face.

Richie can't imagine what Stan would say about his inability to verbalize his feelings for Eddie, so he pushes that down, too. Tries to forget the words in Stan's letter, tries not to wonder if Stan *knew*, if he was one of the only people on Earth, besides Bev, who really saw him, who really had him figured out. Never in a million years would he turn down a chance at having Stan back too, but sometimes Richie is grateful Stan isn't here to lay into him about getting his shit together. *Be brave*, Richie thinks. Yeah fucking *right*.

That's why, when they're all stuffed into a booth on yet another Friday night Losers outing and Richie cracks a dumb joke that makes Eddie squeeze at his thigh under the table, his eyes shining brightly, Richie doesn't throw an arm around Eddie's neck and pull him in for a kiss like he wants to, but instead, orders a round of shots for the table. It does not escape him that in the last week he's been drinking almost as much as before Eddie showed up, but he's pushing everything else down at the moment, so he just adds it to the pile.

When the familiar buzz hits him, then far surpasses him, Eddie and Ben are deep in conversation, so Richie zones out, watching a couple spin around the small dance floor of this dingy bar. They have amazing drink specials and two-for-one appetizers from six to close, and since none of them like to be out late anymore, it's become a weekend favorite. Richie tunes back in right when they're discussing Eddie eventually finding work.

"I've thought about it, yeah," Eddie's saying next to him, and Richie sees Ben supportively nodding, as he always does when he's listening.

"It's tough, though? No social security card, birth certificate, all that's..." Eddie continues, and Richie isn't watching him, but he sees Ben freeze. "Um. It's in New York, I would assume."

"Right," Ben says, and his eyes are still kind and understanding, even through the tension. "Well let me know if you need any help there. Getting anything back, I mean. I'm sure any of us would-"

"I know, it's not," Eddie interrupts, frowning, "it's okay. I'll, I'll get it figured out." He picks at the label on his beer and Richie wants to take his hand, grab at his shoulder, rub at his back. Touching feels perilous, his feelings so close to bubbling over the surface, boiling them both to death.

"Of course. You know we're here, Eddie," Ben assures him, and Richie sighs, four drinks in and feeling the weight of this conversation. Steeling himself, he chances a look toward Eddie, but he's already turned away, over to where Bill is calling for their attention.

Bill and Mike are smushed into the corner of the booth, Bev hanging on Mike's arm. Richie assumes they're going to suggest another plate of garlic fries when Bill's face suddenly falls.

"I have some news," Bill says, all of them watching him with rapt attention. Mike fidgets slightly at his side.

It takes one second too long, and even deep in a tequila fog, Richie can't handle the anticipation.

“Are you *dying*?” Richie all but yells. Everyone gasps and Richie hiccups out a laugh. He figures it’s only up from here. He’s setting the bar low and he’s not ashamed. People need to be fucking realistic about their hopes and dreams, lest they be crushed.

God, tequila makes him somber. He looks to Eddie, who’s shaking his head in shame.

“No, Jesus, Rich, I’m not *dying*,” Bill laughs. He always could take a joke, even if it surprised him in the end. “I’m-I’m getting a divorce.”

That one doesn’t get a gasp, but it does get a visceral reaction from Eddie, all his joints locking up like a vice. Even from his unusual distance at four inches away, Richie can see him trembling. This time, Richie can’t help but reach out. He’s never been able to keep his resolve, always drawn in and reaching out.

Richie’s hand lands on the top of Eddie’s thigh. Eddie makes no indication of noticing, and Richie goes cold.

“Bill, I’m so sorry.” Bev speaks up, and Ben grumbles in sympathy. Bill just shakes his head.

“No, no, it’s n-not necessarily a bad thing. It’s-” he stops, eyes flicking to Mike before settling back on Bev, “it was long overdue. We’ve spent the last four months as a trial separation and both agreed it was for the best.”

Richie can hear Eddie’s shallow breathing. It’s only the second time he’s wished that damn inhaler was still hidden deep within a red fanny pack at Eddie’s waist. All this marriage talk is just too much, Richie knows it.

“Being out here, being-b-being myself... it was different. It was *good*. It was never quite like that with her,” Bill says. He exhales hard, like he’s releasing years of pent up words and feelings. Richie’s a little jealous.

“I’m really glad for you, Bill,” Eddie says, and Richie almost jumps. Eddie’s eyes are dark, clouded over in thought, but he looks genuinely pleased for Bill. Richie slowly pulls his hand away and

Eddie doesn't move. Doesn't look up, just clutches his glass of wine and nods.

"Yeah, good for you, Bill," Richie adds, realizing all his focus has been on Eddie up until now, what else is new. Bev takes it from there.

"Anything you need, you know we-"

"I know," Bill answers, well-versed in the end of their found family tagline. Richie watches them smile softly at each other until Eddie pats him on the thigh. He looks up, and Eddie's eyes are insistent.

"Can you let me out?"

Richie stumbles, throwing his napkin on the table and scooting out of the booth. He'd usually make a show of complaining, grumbling at Eddie for forcing him to haul precious goods from his comfy seat.

Instead, he breathes, "yeah, yeah, sorry, you okay, Eds?"

Eddie slides out after him and mumbles something Richie can't hear, hightailing it toward the restrooms, and Richie takes that as an invitation to follow him. He's had too many drinks to consider Eddie's privacy, and he silently fumes at Bill for stirring up some shit when Eddie was just settling into their life. *His*. His life.

Eddie leads him into the bathroom. Richie stays quiet while he splashes cold water on his face then pulls four paper towels from the dispenser.

"I don't know, *I don't know*," Eddie's grumbling into the towels as he wipes at his face.

"Don't know what?" Richie asks, hovering a few feet away. Eddie throws up his hands, and Richie's worried he's about to burst.

"Who... who I am! What I want. Everyone else seems to be figuring it out, but every time I think I'm close, it's like. It's like something always *changes*. I can't get a handle on how-" Eddie gestures out toward the entirety of the bar, and Richie bites his lip. "You all seem to be figuring shit out. Becoming more of... you. *More* you. I don't

even know where I start. How am I supposed to move forward from *nowhere*?"

In spite of himself, Richie smiles. Eddie huffs like he's taking it personally.

"I think I might have a little idea what that's like," Richie says, and Eddie's eyes stab at him with pity.

"Fuck off, you know this is different," Eddie snaps, and as soon as it's out of his mouth, his eyes go wide. It sounds so much like old Eddie that Richie's heart practically melts out the bottom of his feet. This-Eddie is shocked at his old boldness, but considering the topic of conversation, it's not too surprising.

"It's different but it's also really fucking *not* ," Richie says, moving closer to Eddie, crowding in and grabbing at his arms. Eddie doesn't try to pull away, just watches him intently, his adam's apple bobbing as he cranes up to listen, "I had absolutely no idea who I was, in any tangible way, until I came back to Derry. Well-maybe I *knew*, but I was too fucking scared to ever do anything about it. Ever think about what I wanted or what I liked or who I wanted to be. How to be honest with myself."

They're both shaking, closed in together in front of the sink, and Richie registers his reflection in the mirror behind Eddie. He's flushed red, his jeans wrinkled and his eyes wild. He needs Eddie to know how hard life is, not just for him, but how brave he is for even trying, even getting up every morning not knowing who the fuck he is and not knowing what's ahead of him. Richie's had plenty of days where he couldn't manage it, and now Eddie's giving the both of them the motivation to at least try.

"All of us are working through this shit, same as you. Just because some of us like to announce milestones while drunk doesn't mean you're doing it wrong, Eds. It might be you one day," Richie says, voice going gentle, rubbing his thumbs over the crooks in Eddie's elbows. "Y'know, telling us you're getting a cat or that you actually really *love* my cooking."

Eddie rolls his eyes and exhales, a puff of air against Richie's chest,

hovering over him, so close. They've been here so many times over the past few months, and Richie doesn't want to keep letting him get away.

"Why do you always have to calm me down?" Eddie says, relaxing in Richie's grip. "You cut off my best rants."

"I live to interrupt you, Spaghetti."

Richie wiggles his fingers over Eddie's biceps. Eddie smiles big, still annoyed, but tipsy and hyped up on enough adrenaline to lean into it.

"You are so irritating," Eddie answers, tilting his head up, and Richie swears his eyes flick to Richie's lips.

"Oh, I live to bother the shit out of you, too," Richie says, waiting for Eddie to roll his eyes.

Eddie doesn't even react, just presses up onto his toes, their eyes deadlocked, and Richie feels the heat of him and a hand around his wrist before the door to the bathroom swings open.

It's all way too intimate, too close, Richie's almost positive Eddie is about to kiss him, and his mind fucking breaks. The thought of someone else catching them in that position, in public, in a men's room, dumps a cold bucket of fear onto Richie. He panics, pulling away, and Eddie's still on his toes when Richie's heading for the door.

He doesn't really mean to leave, but it's all he can think to do, not wanting to embarrass Eddie in front of a strange man, and also so worried he coerced Eddie into it. He was *upset*, and Richie got all up in his space, four drinks deep, but there was something... something in Eddie's eyes he can't chalk up to his own overactive anxiety brain. Eddie was leaning in.

Richie bolts from the bathroom, slamming his elbow into the specials board on the way out and approaching their booth. Mike and Bill are there alone. Richie figures Ben and Bev are out dancing or getting another round of drinks, or maybe they left, he's not quite sure how

long that moment between he and Eddie stretched out. It felt like a lifetime. That's when Richie sees it.

Mike and Bill are sitting close, and from a bit of a distance, if he didn't know them, Richie might think Mike was in Bill's lap. Mike's leaning in, whispering in Bill's ear, and Richie stops in his tracks. A prickle creeps down his spine. It feels like he shouldn't go any further, shouldn't interrupt them. It reminds him of Bev and Eddie, crouched together on a love seat, whispering.

Bill hangs his head in a laugh, his cheeks flushed with tequila and beer, and he gives the whole room a once-over, totally neglecting to see Richie in the shaded alcove near the bathrooms. Just like that, he presses into Mike with a kiss.

It doesn't look like the first time. Nowhere near. They look like they know how to kiss each other, mouths opening gently, and Mike's hand moves under the table to pull Bill impossibly closer. Bill cups a hand around Mike's jaw and smiles against him.

Richie feels like a fucking idiot, watching them make out from his hiding spot, having just left Eddie high and dry in the bathroom by himself on the tail-end of almost having a panic attack. There's a million questions swirling through Richie's mind.

When the fuck did this happen?

Who the hell else knew?

Is his gaydar so bad that he seriously didn't notice he's not the only fucking *queer person* in this band of idiots?

And most important: why the fuck hasn't he kissed Eddie like that yet? Tucked into the corner of a booth, music floating over them, hands soft and bodies pliable, gasping and pulling for more.

Why did he skip out on his only opportunity to kiss Eddie like that?

He blinks away the thoughts and when he comes to, Mike and Bill are grinning like idiots, lips a little swollen, glancing around like kissin' spies. It's disgusting.

Richie loves them both.

And he needs to find Eddie.

He spins on his heel, a new-found confidence flowing through him, and promptly smacks right into Eddie finally leaving the bathroom. Eddie groans as Richie's knee collides with his thigh somehow, because Richie is a gangly and uncoordinated motherfucker. Richie hisses in pain but grabs at Eddie's arm, the touch too familiar to not send a thrill through him.

"Fuck, Eddie, did I hurt you?"

"It's fine, Rich-I-" Eddie starts, rubbing at his thigh, and Richie almost suffocates trying to get the words out.

"I'm sorry I left, I don't know what the fuck I'm doing-"

"Richie."

"No, don't, just let me say this-"

"*Richie.*"

"What?!"

Eddie stares at him, taking a deep breath, his shoulders puffing, and Richie wants to follow up on his move in the bathroom and finish that kiss.

"I have to go back to my wife."

Richie suddenly has no idea what to do with his arms, isn't sure if he's ever had arms before, do they usually hang limply at his sides like this? His jaw is weirdly numb and he's pretty sure he's sweating. Eddie is staring at him, looking guilty, and Richie wonders if there's any possible response to what he's just been told. Eddie puts him out

of his misery before he finds one.

"I have to go back," he says again, and Richie flinches. "She thinks I'm *dead*, Richie. I have to-"

"Yeah," Richie says because he actually *really* doesn't want to have this conversation, doesn't even want to let himself believe this is happening, chalking it up to some fever dream he fell into when he saw Eddie move to kiss him, that's why he dreamt up Bill and Mike kissing, too, suddenly this all makes a whole lot more sense, and then Eddie is still staring at him.

"Are you okay?" Eddie asks. All at once, Richie is pissed, and he needs to get the fuck out of this bar before his head explodes. He's riled up from almost making out, and then seeing his friends make out, and then deciding to go *actually* make out, and then have the literal opposite of making out actually *happen* .

"Yeah, yeah, man. That sounds- you gotta do what's best for you." Richie presses a hand to Eddie's shoulder and attempts a smile before breaking away fast. Eddie's still hanging his head a bit, but he blinks up at Richie and sags under his touch. "I'm gonna call it a night, I think, uh. You'll get a ride with the lovebirds?"

Eddie's mouth opens to respond, but gives up, and it closes again with a click. He nods.

"I'll see you back, back at. At the apartment." He points somewhere, then shoves his hands in the pockets of his jeans, waves, and turns on his heel. It feels like swallowing a knife, shoving it down and trying to walk through it.

Bev catches him near the door.

"You're leaving?" She asks, her eyes searching behind him. "Where's Eddie?"

Richie fidgets and laughs, but it's a pathetic sound, wet in his mouth.

"He's probably planning a flight out as we speak."

"What? Richie-" She presses a hand to his chest, stopping him from

leaving. He brings a hand up to hold it there, covering it with his own. His chest is tight and his eyes burn and he just needs to get out.

“Not sure why I thought I had a chance, I,” he mumbles, and his voice breaks, and it pisses him off again, “I gotta go, Bev. Tell everyone I imbibed too heavily, it wouldn’t be a lie.”

He’s out the door before she can stop him. Or maybe she lets him go.

Eddie gets on a plane to New York two days later.

Ben decides to go with him, citing legalities and technicalities and other fancy things Richie doesn’t give a shit about and therefore doesn’t listen to. All he can focus on is how Eddie will barely look at him.

It feels like emotional whiplash.

Richie’s been in a low-simmer of panic since the night they almost kissed at the bar. The thought of actually looking at Eddie, seeing pity on his face, and the anger he surely holds for Richie for abandoning him, not just now but *then*, is just too much to handle.

On the few occasions Eddie tries to talk to him, Richie stutters out half-answers like he’s taking a test. He’s starting to sound like Bill.

And even Bill has cut the stutter, his mouth busy with much better things these days.

Bill shows up the morning before Eddie’s planned departure time to pick him up, Ben already in tow downstairs.

Eddie lugs a bag, somehow full to the brim of belongings and clothing he’s come into in the past two and a half months, into the doorway and stares at Bill.

“Uh.” Eddie clears his throat, and Bill shifts awkwardly on his feet.

“Oh, I’ll take this down and be back up in a jiff,” Bill says, jumping to get Eddie’s bag and leave for the car.

Richie snorts at the phrasing, then almost chokes when he sees Eddie’s line of vision on him like daggers.

“Hope the plane and security and all that goes well,” he says, otherwise at a loss, and Eddie looks down. Richie feels the prickle of tears at his eyes and shoves it down hard and fast. How did things change so fucking quickly?

“Thanks,” Eddie answers, eyes still on the ground.

“You can, uh, just. Maybe text me when you get in?” Richie asks, and it feels like too much, but he can’t bear the thought of having to text Ben to ask if they made it safely. Eddie nods, his forehead and lips pinched.

“Of course, yeah.”

Eddie doesn’t follow that with anything, so Richie doesn’t either. They’ve gotten so good at horrible silences in the last two days that Richie isn’t even surprised. His heart pounds and his hands clench and he wants to scream at Eddie not to leave, to stay here and deal with this, with *them*, but he knows he doesn’t deserve it. Richie had his chance, and he blew it.

“Rich?” Eddie asks, his eyes keeping Richie in place.

“Yeah, bud?” Richie sees a flicker of recognition at that. He wonders if it’s a memory or the pity he’s so dreaded.

“You know I have to do this, right?”

Richie’s chest catches. “I know,” he says, even though he doesn’t. Apparently it’s enough, because Eddie nods. And then Bill reappears, clapping his hands together.

“You ready, Eds?”

Eddie looks sad and determined, and Richie stops himself from flying over the couch to sweep him up into his arms and keep him safe.

They wave a goodbye. Richie's hand floats through the air and it feels like something finally dies in him.

When Eddie's out of view, Bill turns on him.

"You're *seriously* not going to see him off with the rest of us?" Bill says, voice weighing heavy on Richie's already pounding head.

"Bill, please."

"No, fuck you, man, he's going through a lot. He needs his f-f-"

"Who says I'm one of those?" Richie says, a panicked yell. Bill looks like he's been slapped.

"What are you *talking* about?"

Richie shakes his head. He wants to numb everything building up in his chest. He needs a fucking drink but there's an asshole here intent on making him feel worse.

"Listen, man, I'm not going to the airport with your little band of buddies, okay? Can we leave it at that?"

Bill deflates, but Richie can see the tension in his shoulders. He's well-versed in Bill's pissed-off body language, and he appears to be winding up to a full-on scolding. Richie's heart sinks when Bill just pats him on the back and heads for the door.

"You're gonna regret this, Rich," he says, running a hand through his hair. "Trust me."

"You don't know what you're fucking talking about," Richie says with a bite. Bill peers back at him while invisible hands claw at Richie's throat. Bill can't *possibly* know what this is like and pretending isn't going to help anyone, least of all Richie. There's no one on Earth that could understand how it feels to lose everything you wanted for thirty years without even knowing it. And then once you get it back, to be faced with the humiliating and utter failure of making it work because you were too fucking chicken, too fucking stupid, and not... enough to be what you needed to be.

Bill made his move. Richie has no idea what's going on between he and Mike, but he knows that kiss wasn't a casual hook-up kind of thing. It was fucking *intimate*, something two people share when one of those people just left his wife and the other person pulls him closer and whispers something like, "*I'm proud of you,*" in his ear. Richie definitely has not spent the last two days imagining him and Eddie in their places or how he would have kissed Eddie the same way, but with a hand on the back of his head and the other on his arm, and how Eddie might have sighed into his mouth, and how no one would have heard it but the two of them.

But Richie hadn't done any of it. He'd watched Bill do it instead.

Everything Richie thought about himself once he left Derry is true. And that might be the thing that hurts the most.

Bill's just watching him, and Richie wants to hide under someone's porch.

"You know that's not true," Bill finally says, a lot softer than Richie deserves.

With that, he's gone, and Richie can finally cry, alone and sunken into his couch.

The next two weeks creep along horribly.

There's empty bottles piling on Richie's counter and a swell of emails from his agent in his inbox.

He ignores it all to stare at the handful of texts Eddie has sent him.

Made it in, the flight was fine. Hope you had a good day.

Then, two days later, *Do you know what date it was I showed up at your place?*

Richie doesn't answer because he doesn't know. Definitely doesn't want to think about it hard enough to figure out.

Then, last night, more than ten days after, *Everything is a lot quieter without you around.*

He's not sure what the *fuck* that means, and he spends the next three hours reading it again and again, hoping the words will jump off his screen and do an interpretive dance, because even that would be clearer than the source material.

But Richie's not a hypocrite, and he didn't answer Eddie's last question, and this isn't a question, but it feels like it needs an answer.

He types back, **Is that some sort of twisted compliment?** And tries not to look at his phone for the rest of the afternoon.

...he lasts ten minutes, which feels admirable in the moment.

It's late at night, and he's in bed because it's his favorite place, and the light of his lock screen stings his eyes. There's a notification.

Yes

Richie slides his thumb across the screen to check for more. There is none.

Eddie doesn't text again.

Bev does the next morning, and that one also takes Richie most of the day to answer.

Do you have time in your pouting schedule to grab a drink with me? Our usual place?

Richie buries his head in his hands and groans, loudly, because he

doesn't have a roommate/best friend/tiny ball of confusion around to shush him anymore.

He's avoided Bev until now. Just like everything else.

The rest of the Losers try to check in on Richie multiple times, but he can't bring himself to answer.

Ben sends him updates on he and Eddie's trip, but Richie doesn't even read most of them.

Mike invites him over to watch a movie with him and Bill. Richie imagines what it would be like to third-wheel the whole night while trying to pretend he didn't see them make out two weeks ago. Watching them be all covertly lovey-dovey would feel like a literal karmic punishment. He certainly doesn't want another lecture from Bill, especially not with a big ol' side helping of genuine and sincere Mike.

And now Bev is prodding him, and he feels angry and frustrated and lonely while simultaneously overwhelmed with everyone in his life.

So he does what every rational human being with a boatload of trauma and unsolved issues does when they're backed against a wall: masturbates with a fervor.

Sick of the misery and the bullshit on cable, Richie stomps to his bedroom and rips off his pants. There's been a curved, purple dildo burning a hole in his dresser drawer for the past few months, and he's determined to finally put it to use. He would buy it dinner first, but it would be a total waste of money. Plus, he's spent the last half hour in a fog of sexual fantasies after an actor in a shitty Netflix rom-com went on a rant about bacteria while pushing a brunette curl from his face.

It may not have happened exactly like that, but it's been two weeks since he's seen Eddie, and now he sees him in *everything*.

It's not like it would be the first time he's gotten off to Eddie, or someone resembling him, but it's certainly the first time since he's come back. And then... left again.

Either way, Richie teases the toy between his legs and pushes away the guilt of imagining Eddie hovering over him, pressing into him, loving it just as much as he does.

He comes hard, Eddie's name on his lips, and immediately chucks the dildo across the room.

He finds his phone and texts Bev.

Can you pick me up?

She sends back a thumbs up emoji twenty seconds later. Richie sets an alarm and naps until twenty minutes before she's set to arrive.

"So is this a confirmation that I'm your favorite?" Bev asks him, swirling the tiny stick in her drink. Richie kicks a leg out from where it dangles off his bar stool. He laughs.

"I think we both know you've always been my favorite," he says, and it's not exactly a lie, if they're leaving out a certain amnesiac with a stunning ability to capture his attention. Bev slaps her hand down on the bar, palm up. Richie presses his own into it, and she smiles up at him.

"And what about the *real* favorite?"

He huffs and removes his hand from hers.

"You would know better than me. It's your husband that's with him."

That earns him a glare, and he winces, feeling like an ass. He knows she's sensitive about she and Ben not being married. She's made it clear she doesn't want to get married again, at least not now - too many bad associations.

"You're an asshole."

She steals his hand back.

Richie looks out onto the dance floor, where two sets of couples are pressed together, lazily swaying to the music. He misses Eddie in tiny little stabs all over his body, spreading thin over his skin. It's been accumulating, this empty feeling of loss. Having Bev here actually does help, but it also makes it real. He takes a gulp of his whiskey.

"You two really haven't talked?"

Richie sets down an empty glass and groans.

"He texted a couple times. Nothing important." He takes a deep breath. Bev rubs a light finger over his wrist. It sends a bolt to his heart. He wants to pull away.

"Shockingly, no love declarations. Nor a single dick pic! Even after I cornered him in a men's bathroom and then ran out on him when things got too real." Richie eyes the bartender and points at his empty tumbler. It's only his second, and he already feels like he wants ten more.

"You didn't *corner* him," she scoffs, more focused on her drink than her words, but Richie sees the recognition fall across her face within a mere moment. He clears his throat.

"Did he... tell you about this?"

She looks away, and he gasps.

"He told you what happened?"

"Yes! We talk! What did you expect?"

Richie throws up his hands. "I don't know, I've been in a fucking fog of regret and shame the past two weeks, I wasn't exactly considering the possibilities!"

"Well maybe that's the problem." Bev peers right into him, and now it's his turn to look away. His glass is magically full again, anyway.

"What," Richie spits into his first drink, because she won't stop

staring at him, the vein in her forehead popping from holding it in.

“You! That’s what. You think this is all about you?” Her face is getting red. “You think you’re the only one freaking out right now? He’s meeting the person he’s *married to* for what feels like the first time. He’s got to face the whole life he made for himself with no memory of doing it. Don’t fucking tell me he couldn’t use your help through that.”

“Could’ve fooled me.” Richie knows he’s being an ass, but he doesn’t want to think about Eddie, definitely not like this, not in a self-aware, emotionally mature way. Bev huffs and he’s worried she’s about to start screaming. He’d probably join her.

Instead, she takes a drink and grips her hand around his knee.

“This has been on his mind since the beginning. He knew he was going to have to face it one day.”

“Yeah,” Richie coughs a laugh, the alcohol making his words stick. “And I finally scared him to it.”

“He’s not doing this to hurt you. Cut this self-pity bullshit. The whole world isn’t about you.” Bev drains her drink and grabs at his other knee. Swiveling his stool until they face each other, she hiccups almost directly in his face.

“Why are-”

“Give him some time. And some space, if he needs it.” She looks so serious, so determined and utterly confident that Richie believes her.

“Still hurts,” he mumbles, because he’s only human. Bev hums next to him and orders another round.

They drink it in silence, watching each other pivot on their stools. Richie’s floating on it, and when Bev’s on her phone getting them a ride home after glass number four, it slurs out in a whisper.

“On the couch, at the party,” he starts, and Bev looks up.

“Hmm?”

“At Bill and Mike’s.” She nods in recognition. “What-what were you talkin’ about?”

She freezes and shakes her head, then notices a sip of whiskey left in her glass. Once she’s finished, she squeezes her eyes shut.

“He asked me something. Like, trying to remember. About you two.” She’s drunk, and so is he, and that settles over them for awhile.

“What was it?”

She’s thoughtful for a moment, and Richie wonders if she’s bullshitting him. His heart pounds in his chest just in case.

“About how close you two were. As kids.” She goes back to typing on her phone. One of the couples from earlier on the dance floor are heading out the door, arms draped around one another, one of them pressing a kiss to the top of the other’s head.

Richie clenches his jaw.

Bev smacks a kiss goodbye to Richie’s cheek and he stumbles out of the car and toward his building.

“Answer your texts, asshole!” she yells. He ignores her and pulls out his keys.

As soon as he gets home he peels off his pants and crawls into bed. He puts his glasses on his bedside table and watches the silvery glow of his phone next to his pillow. He sits up, unlocking it, meaning to check his texts, but then his thumb hits “call” and there’s a ringing in his ear.

Richie’s really drunk and sad and his mind is absolutely teeming with regret and words unsaid. It’s not a good idea, he knows it’s not, but he needs Eddie to know some things he just couldn’t say before, and the memory of Bev telling him he’s brave after finally coming out at

forty kicks that last little vestige of courage into him.

It goes to voicemail, and things are too blurry to tell if he's relieved. He just waits for the beep.

"Hey, Eds," he says, when it finally comes, "I'm- Bev took me out drinking and it's, it's totally fine that you didn't answer. Uh," he falters, because that's what he does best, and then his voice is breaking, and he almost hangs up. "Jesus, um. I'm sorry. I'm so fucking sorry, Eddie, for smothering you and taking advantage and pushing you, just. Way too hard."

He tries to take a deep breath but he's still light-headed. His hand grips at his pillow.

"I've been so. So focused on not burdening you with my bullshit. With pushing my own shit down so I didn't lay it on you, and I'm thinking maybe that wasn't the best decision? Or that maybe we could have... laid it all out. Together. I just had you back and," he sniffs, pressing the heel of his palm to his forehead, where a dull ache is forming, "I didn't want to let go. To let you go. Again."

He's so fucking pathetic, and he's basically crying, openly, and it's all documented on Eddie's voicemail. So much for giving him space.

"Anyway, I need some sleep and water, I'm gonna. This was Bev's fault, just. Tell her I say hi, I guess. I'm gonna," he stops, and wishes he had never called. "I'm gonna let you go. Or-go. Sleep. Bye, Spaghetti," he says, wincing. "Shit. Sorry."

He hangs up and presses his pillow hard against his face. He falls asleep in a matter of minutes.

He jolts awake to a hard pounding on the door. He squints open an eye and the sunlight blinds him. He's hungover, but not overly so, he slept well, but as he drags himself out of bed and toward the noise, the heartburn and headache hit him full force.

They're immediately forgotten when he opens the door to see Eddie standing before him.

It's so familiar it's frightening, and he's woken from such a deep sleep he's worried it's a dream. Eddie's in a dark red shirt and a jacket way too heavy for LA, and he looks tired, too. Richie can barely breathe looking at him.

"Eddie-" he says, and then Eddie is brushing past him, hands clenched in fists at his sides. Richie blinks the sleep away from his eyes. "When did you get back?"

"Last night," Eddie answers, and Richie wonders if Bev knew. If that's why she asked him out for drinks.

"Last night."

"Yeah, after you called me."

"I called you at one in the morning."

Eddie tips his head, measuring. "Okay, I guess it was this morning, then. Two hours ago." His eyes shift, and he bites his lip. "I came here from the airport."

Richie's not sure what to think about Eddie hearing his sad sack voicemail and immediately jumping on a plane. He can barely remember what he even *said*. He just knows he meant it, and it felt horrible saying it.

"After you-"

"Yes, Richie, after I heard your fucking voicemail and suddenly remembered *everything* and I'm here to tell you a lot of things that I can't quite sort through right now because you're. You're wearing fucking boxers-" Eddie's actually *stuttering*, bouncing between thoughts, and did he say he remembered everything? He decides to return to that boxers comment later.

"You... remember?"

"Yeah, asshole."

Richie catches himself on the wall, his legs wobbly, the full weight of everything hitting him. Eddie's here, like, all versions of Eddie there are, and it's not all that different. Not like he thought it would be.

"I don't... how?"

Eddie sighs, his resolve crumbling just a little.

"I don't *know*. But it all came back. It's not like..." Eddie trails off, and Richie holds his breath. "It's not like I became someone different all of a sudden, it's just like, I. Merged? I remember it all. I remember showing up at your door and I remember the arcade and I remember Pennywise and the clubhouse and I definitely remember your *stupid* fucking jokes, and how you made me feel, and it's all because I hadn't heard your fucking voice in two weeks and when I did, I—" Eddie's caught, hanging on the edge of something.

Richie's chest cracks wide open, and this time he's pretty sure Eddie is beating him to the punch, but he couldn't care less. He'll take the hit.

Eddie stares at him and Richie stares back.

"I left LA because I knew I had to end it," Eddie says, and Richie closes his eyes against the words, "My marriage. I knew I wanted to try something with you, even if I wasn't the same person. I didn't know if you wanted the same thing, but I didn't know if me being married was what was stopping you, or if it was because I wasn't exactly *me*."

They're hovering in the hall together, Richie crowded up against the wall, and he braces his hands behind him. Every word pulls another plug in his heart, and he's not sure how much longer before he loses power.

"It wasn't—" Richie tries, but Eddie holds up a hand.

"I didn't remember anything when I was in New York. With Myra," he says, speaking slowly, "I thought I would. I thought it would be like when I was here, memories every so often, just little flickers, and there was nothing. I didn't remember one single thing. Not even

when she *touched* me.” Eddie’s hands curl inward, and Richie’s heart aches.

“I had just gotten the whole process started, Ben is helping me, he’s got some lawyer friend. Then I woke up just in time to miss your call, and I meant to call you back, but I heard your voice and I-I got on a plane-” Eddie’s clutching at his own hips, and Richie wants to press into them too, can’t stand not touching him. But he waits on Eddie, just like he always does. Like he has been for months, and maybe years, maybe *decades*.

His mouth, however, waits for no man.

“Did I awaken something in you, Spaghetti-man?” Richie asks. It’s more of a groan, and not in a sexy way, but there’s still heat in Eddie’s eyes.

Eddie puffs out a breath and his lips turn up in a smile.

“I don’t know why I’m fucking surprised,” he says, wound up but easy with it. “It was always you.”

Richie can see the crinkle in Eddie’s cheeks, the bright look in his eyes. There’s nothing guarded there anymore. He had gotten used to missing Eddie while he was right next to him, but this is new. Like Eddie’s somehow lived another life and he got to be there for it. Like they both know it now, can both see each timeline.

“You trying to tell me something?” Richie asks, and they trade stupid grins across the room.

“Yeah, idiot.”

“And that would be...”

“Can you just finally cut the shit and kiss me?” Eddie says, and Richie moves forward, taking slow and deliberate steps, and Eddie leans into his space as soon as he’s close enough. This time, Richie sees it clearly.

“Only if you’re sure,” Richie asks. His heart lurches with leftover hesitation, but Eddie’s eyes hold tight on his. He grabs at Eddie’s hips

and practically shivers. Eddie swallows.

“Fuckin’ kiss me and see if I’m sure,” he says, a rumble in his chest, a challenge and a request, and Richie takes it, his lips on Eddie in an instant, closing the gap he’s always kept between them for his own safety. Now Eddie’s broken down all his barriers, and Richie’s suddenly flying free.

He wants to take it slow, but Eddie’s mouth opens against his as soon as they’re together and all his composure flies out the window. Their lips strain at each other. Richie’s hands forget the indent in Eddie’s hips and clasp at either side of his face instead, thumbing gently at his cheeks. Eddie raises a hand too, pressing one over Richie’s, over his scar. It all feels so good, but Richie’s hangover is like an emotional fizzle at the center of his brain and he’s almost ready to cry. Breaking off, he sucks in a breath, leaning their foreheads together.

Eddie noses at his cheek, panting already. Richie woke up too recently, can’t believe Eddie is here and pressed up against him, gasping into their kisses like he really *wants* this. When Richie looks at him, his eyes are wide.

“Think I woulda remembered this,” Eddie says, quiet between them.

“Huh?” Richie’s head is clouded and Eddie tries to turn away, his hand falling. Richie catches him, a small, dry kiss to his lips, and Eddie comes back.

“I thought maybe,” he starts, his eyes bouncing around, trying to avoid Richie. “I thought we might have done this. When I didn’t remember. When we were kids.”

Richie’s heart flips over in his chest.

“God, I *wish*, Eds. I would’ve given anything to kiss you silly when you were a small little bullwhip.” He leans forward to kiss Eddie again, because he can, and it could probably kill him, how well they fit. Eddie kisses him back with a flustered grunt and pulls away.

“And that is why I didn’t kiss you.”

"That's the only reason? The names?" Richie asks, and he can see the heat high on Eddie's cheeks, can feel it, too.

"Yeah, that and I was scared out of my little gay mind."

"...your... what?" It's like he's been struck by lightning, hearing Eddie call himself gay with such ease, like he knows it in his bones, just like Richie does, now. Eddie kisses him quickly, shaking his head.

"Gay, Richie, keep up, I'm trying to get my fucking tongue back in your mouth." And then Eddie sweeps a tongue over Richie's bottom lip and Richie moans. It's soft and also desperate, the way Eddie kisses, and Richie pulls him in closer, hands still around his face. Richie wants all of him.

"Okay, but we are *definitely* returning to some of these topics later," Richie says, and Eddie nods before mouthing at his neck. When he feels Eddie's hands push under the hem of his shirt something snaps in him.

The counter of the kitchen is so close to where they're clutched together in the hallway, so Richie walks Eddie backward until they hit the edge. He presses their chests together and sets his mouth on Eddie's for several minutes until they're both frantic with it. Eddie keeps pulling at his hair, and that makes Richie circle his hips forward, and now they're in a slow grind, the build up of it all too much for them to hold anything back. Eddie pulls away from licking at Richie's neck to groan when Richie's growing erection bumps into his.

Richie finally breaks a sweat, the sound of Eddie overwhelming. He kisses him hard, groaning himself, but into Eddie's mouth, and Eddie clutches his hands roughly at Richie's hips.

"Fuck," Eddie says, mouth red and kissed to hell, and then he buries his face in Richie's neck and heaves a breath. "Don't take this the wrong way, but you're a *really* good kisser."

Richie's already on fire but it still burns at him, and his hips bolt forward once, cause *fuck*, it's been so long, and it's never been like *this*.

“What’s the wrong way to take that?” He asks, putting an inch of space between them so he can calm himself down. At this pace, he’s going to come in his pants. Eddie presses back into him.

“Don’t want you getting any delusions of grandeur,” Eddie says, whispered right into Richie’s mouth, and Eddie’s so fucking confident and sexy and pliable that Richie whines. He’s given up the ghost - if they keep kissing like this, Eddie will know exactly how much Richie wants him. And that thought is starting to scare him less and less, especially with Eddie clinging to him, licking into his mouth and cupping at the top of Richie’s ass over his boxers. It somehow feels like they’re evenly matched in desperation.

“Always keeping me humble,” Richie says, then, “What do you want? How... tell me what you want.”

Eddie whimpers, suddenly looking overwhelmed.

“I don’t know, I, uh,” he says, his chest expanding and falling a little too quickly, and Richie presses their lips together to calm him down. It seems to work, and Richie remembers Eddie telling him his touch always brought him back to Earth.

“I’m happy just kissing you, Eds, but you feel good,” Richie says, a hand cupping at Eddie’s cheek, and Eddie nods.

“I want more, but. Maybe we can go to the-to your bedroom?” he offers, and Richie tries to keep his cool.

“The bedroom. Yes. Right.”

“Is that okay?” Eddie’s eyes widen, and Richie slides his hand down to grip at his shoulder.

“Fuck yes, it’s okay, Eds. I just didn’t think I’d be nursing a hangover by, well-” he stops short, wanting to say *by sucking your dick*, because that’s all that’s on his mind right now, but he’s not sure if that’s what Eddie wants, so instead he pulls at Eddie’s hand and heads to the bedroom. “It’s okay, trust me, there’s nothing you could do that wouldn’t be okay right now.”

Eddie laughs as he’s led along, and Richie has to stop on the way

there to smother him in kisses all over again. They made it halfway there, but Richie decides taking his time is, for once in his life, probably the right move. It certainly feels that way when Eddie pushes him back into the wall and rubs a soft hand over the bulge of his crotch.

“Oh my god,” he moans, a heavy sting of arousal creeping up to his belly button. He kisses Eddie with abandon, and feels him smile against his lips. He thinks of Bill and Mike, kissing and smiling, close together and finally free, and he wraps his arms around Eddie’s middle.

“I don’t know if I can make it to the bedroom, man,” Eddie says when they pull apart, and Richie almost doubles over at the rough sound of his voice coupled with the feathery almost-there touch of his fingers.

“I need to be vertical, my knees are about to give out and you’re barely fucking touching me,” Richie answers, and Eddie chokes out a laugh.

“Okay, okay,” he says, voice light and happy, pressing a dorky kiss to Richie’s clothed shoulder. “Let’s go, let’s go.”

In the rush to the bedroom, Richie feels like a teenager. He has no idea how it would have felt to do this with Eddie in high school, both somehow out from under the violent and fearful town and the overarching bubble of oppression and danger that flowed through the air in every waking second. But now, it seems like reliving his youth, and he tickles at Eddie’s sides to make him giggle. He can picture them small and breathless, kissing behind the bleachers or the dark comfort of his parent’s basement.

Eddie strips off his shirt once they get to the bedroom, and Richie remembers with a start how much he’s always *wanted* him. He’s thin with some muscles, pale and a bit stringy, and Richie aches with wanting to touch him.

The scar down his middle is jagged but healing over quickly, and it surprises him in the midst of everything. Richie reaches out to pull Eddie in, smoothing a hand over it. Eddie looks up at him and his eyes quirk, and Richie could cry, but Eddie’s pressed against him

again, and Richie's always wanted to be this close.

Eddie feels just as good as he looks. Richie wraps around him, hands just above his hips and mouthing over his collarbone. Eddie shivers under his hands, like he wants Richie just as much. The thought makes Richie's breathing uneven.

He savors the kiss for a little while, but he's been preoccupied since feeling Eddie hard and pressing against him in the kitchen, so he sets Eddie down on the edge of the bed and drops to his knees between his legs. Eddie's eyes are big and dark.

"This isn't vertical, you know that, right?" Eddie says, and Richie looks up at him.

"No shit?" Richie says, hands finding Eddie's zipper. He raises an eyebrow and Eddie gapes. "This okay?"

Eddie nods, mouth still hanging open, and Richie leans up to kiss him while they both work at getting his pants unzipped. Before they can get any further, Eddie takes off Richie's shirt, and Richie doesn't have the heart to feel self-conscious when Eddie dips his head to lick at one of his nipples. He hisses and Eddie does it again.

"That has never felt this good before," Richie says, his voice catching when Eddie presses another kiss to his shoulder, this one a little less innocent with a lot more tongue.

"Have you been with a guy before?" Eddie asks, face still hidden against Richie's skin. Richie tenses, shame burning in his belly.

There were a few kisses with a few guys in his twenties, but he had promptly shoved it to the back of his brain, overlaid with the Derry fog. It all came back in a flash when they returned, along with his suffocating feelings for Eddie, and they sort of twisted up and got lost in each other. Now Richie wonders if it's because Eddie's the only one he's ever truly wanted.

Richie had avoided relationships all of his adult life. He'd slept with a few women, but nothing near serious. He'd never even stayed the night with anyone.

He watches Eddie kiss along the soft part of his belly, feels his hands skim over his thighs, takes in the growing flush creeping down Eddie's back, and he wants everything and anything Eddie will give him. Richie's ready for serious, ready for a relationship, ready for the whole kit and kaboodle, as long as Eddie knows he has no idea what he's doing. But that's kind of a given between them already.

"Not really, not-not anything worth writing home about," he finally answers. Eddie hums, kissing gently along Richie's neck, up onto his chin and one on each cheek. Their eyes meet and Richie suddenly wants to hide.

"Well that makes two of us," Eddie says, smiling. Richie smiles back. Eddie makes him feel whole and safe and it's a little disarming.

"I know I want to blow you," he says, because he really, *really* does.

Eddie jerks at that, hand tightening on Richie's arm.

"Fuck, *Richie*, don't just drop shit like that on me," he says. Richie feels smug, light-headed at the thought of seeing Eddie's dick, much less getting his mouth around it. He fixes Eddie with a look.

"Yeah, it's not like you had any hints," Richie says, trailing a hand down toward Eddie's crotch. His pants are popped open, and Richie wants to reach inside. "Like say, the fact that I'm currently kneeling between your legs and trying to get your dick out."

Eddie glances down and then moves to stand up, remembering he was going to get naked. Richie scoots back awkwardly to give him some space, then reaches out to brush a hand over any bit of skin he can find. The hair on Eddie's forearm, the juncture between his thigh and ass, and then, as soon as Eddie's seated again, the base of his cock. Eddie groans, a pinched and painful thing, and Richie's other hand is around the nape of his neck, holding him up, fingers braced and gentle.

"You look good," Richie says, because he's *right there* and he looks *really* fucking good. Richie's mouth waters at the sight of him, and he presses a kiss to Eddie's thigh, feeling the heat of him against his cheek. Eddie hisses and grips at Richie's shoulder.

“Don’t tease me,” he says, scolding. Richie laughs. He strokes his hand slowly up Eddie’s erection and kisses gently at the head.

“I don’t really know what I’m doing,” Richie says. Eddie peers down at him, cheeks heavily flushed.

“We’ve been over this, Rich,” he points between the two of them, “both virgins.”

“Whoa, hey, no one said I was a *virgin*,” Richie protests, his hand still sliding up the length of Eddie. Eddie rolls his eyes and Richie wants to kiss him, so he does, which only angers him further. Richie’s stomach flutters and he gives Eddie a small squeeze.

“*Fuck*, I’m talking about you never having had a dick in your mouth, asshole,” Eddie says, almost right into his mouth, and Richie moans and squeezes at him again.

“I would have a response to that, but I’m too distracted by your use of mouth, asshole and dick in such close proximity,” he says, pressing a hand to himself through his boxers. Having Eddie in his hand is making him dizzy, and it feels like they barely started.

Eddie slaps at his chest, his back bowing when Richie’s mouth descends on him.

“*Ohmygod*.” Eddie tangles a hand in Richie’s hair and he moans around him.

Richie really doesn’t have any idea what he’s doing, so he goes with his instincts and focuses on what makes Eddie feel good, which seems to be everything. Eddie whimpers and writhes under him, hips stuttering on the bed when Richie comes off and licks at him, filthy and enthusiastic. It’s messy, Richie’s not sure how the fuck you’re supposed to keep both a dick and your own saliva in your mouth. Especially not when the dick belongs to the super-hot love of your life and he’s groaning above you like a dying man. But he goes with it, and uses the excess spit to help the slide of his hand up to meet his own lips.

Eddie’s big, big enough that Richie can’t fit him in his mouth, but

when he manages most of it, the hard feel of him against his tongue is almost too much. Richie pulls off so he can push his underwear down and take himself in hand. Eddie whines.

“Shouldn’t I-”

“I’m never gonna last, and I want to see you come,” Richie whispers and takes him back in, bobbing down around the head and back up as best he can. Eddie’s shaking against him.

“I’m not gonna fuckin’ last either, not with you like that,” Eddie says, his hand back in Richie’s hair, and Richie groans, wishing he could take Eddie down his throat, feel him come, swallow it down. It feels like he’s lost his mind. He wants to stay in this room for days, touching and kissing every inch of Eddie, make every sound pour out of him and then do it all again.

Eddie’s panting, holding him firmly by the hair. Every move of Richie’s mouth makes him shiver. Richie feels him tense and he pulls off to finish him with his hand. He strokes at himself faster, feeling his orgasm burn brightly at the base of his cock, hoping he can hold off to let Eddie come first. Eddie’s hand unclenches from Richie’s hair and grabs at his arms.

“Kiss me, *fuck*, come here,” he says in a rush, and Richie goes easily. When they meet, it’s gentler than what Richie expected and his stomach flutters. Eddie scoots forward on the edge of the bed and meets Richie’s hand on himself, slapping it away and gripping him hard to keep stroking. Richie gasps into their kiss and diverts his focus back on making Eddie come.

Richie can feel their hands brush, awkwardly jerking each other off side by side, groaning and gripping, foreheads sweaty and jumbled together.

Eddie touching him alone probably could have done it, but then Eddie wraps both his legs around them, pressing in at Richie’s thighs, and Richie buckles. He’s spent so long wanting Eddie closer, leaning into his space as much as he could, and now Eddie’s the one pulling him in, keeping him close, and Richie breaks with it. He comes all over Eddie’s hand, between the both of them, and it sets Eddie off,

too.

They kiss through it, Eddie groaning, deep and low. He can feel Eddie come on him, big and hot and firm in his hand. He thinks *I want that inside me* and it sets a fire in him just as he's coming down. Eddie keeps kissing him, slow and tired, running a hand over his back, and it's really fucking cute. Richie feels all warm and happy, too stupid in love to be worried about what this all means.

When they fall away from each other, mostly because Richie needs to get off his knees, Eddie grins at him like a dope. Richie wipes them both off and Eddie throws the bedspread in the washing machine. They brush their teeth in Richie's bathroom, side by side, and Richie can't keep his hands off Eddie, especially since he's only wearing his briefs. When Richie's hangover rears its ugly head, Eddie drags him back to the bed and stretches out next to him, head on his chest, tucked under his arm.

"I didn't exactly get any sleep last night," Eddie says, and Richie hums, too busy keeping his breathing even so Eddie can't hear the racing beat of his heart.

It doesn't take long for Eddie to fall asleep against him, and Richie listens to him snore and mumble for almost twenty minutes before joining him.

They wake sometime in the early afternoon, and Eddie immediately wrestles Richie into a tangle of limbs. Eventually, they're naked, though they didn't have far to go. Richie's on top of Eddie, pushing down, sliding together, and he can feel every inch of him, and then Eddie's hands grab at Richie's ass and he comes. Eddie follows, after Richie hikes his thighs up onto his hips and strokes at him hard to return the favor.

"I missed you," he whispers in Eddie's ear while they're catching their breath, and Eddie holds him tighter.

Eddie's phone lights up and Richie sees Ben's name. Eddie looks a little guilty and picks it up to read, sending a quick text back before shoving it in a drawer.

"What'd Haystack have to say?"

Eddie hesitates. "Wondering if I went through with it."

Richie goes warm, as if the sight of Eddie whipping him up afternoon pancakes isn't already arousing enough.

"What'd you say?" he asks, sipping at a glass of water. Eddie shifts, bare feet on the tile of the kitchen. Richie sidles up next to him.

"That it's only 3pm and I've already had two orgasms." Eddie's cheeks go pink with remembering. Richie runs a hand over his shoulders and pulls him in for a kiss.

"I think we can make it to three," he says, and they burn a few pancakes before giving up and heading back to the bedroom.

"You did *not* give me tons of signals, you absolute buffoon," Eddie yells, but he's glowing with a deep laugh, and Richie throws a mini corn cob at him from his take out box. Eddie had protested eating in bed, but then Richie kissed him, soft and teasing until he got hard again, and the argument was forgotten in favor of other things.

"Well I'm sorry, but you're horrible at reading people. I think I was pretty obvious when we were kids," Richie says. He's not sure how he wasn't exceedingly transparent to everyone, actually, because he's always been about as subtle as a house on fire, he carved initials into a fucking bridge, but Eddie has always been bad at admitting he's

wrong when it means Richie is right. Richie loves it. Richie loves every single thing about Eddie, and now there are many, many more things for him to learn and explore and love.

“Just when we were kids?” Eddie raises his eyebrows. Richie wants to eat him alive. He’s at the foot of the bed, a sheet sprawled over his middle, and Richie can see the shape of him through the thin fabric. He swallows down the bite of chow mein in his mouth and sets his box down. Eddie presses his knees together.

“Don’t you dare touch me with those greasy fingers,” he warns, and Richie crawls towards him, wiggling his hands.

“Let me show you what a real signal looks like, Spaghetti.” Richie pinches at Eddie’s torso, really just wanting to feel him, and Eddie shrieks, squirming away.

“Don’t fucking touch me, Richie!”

Richie can’t quite believe Eddie’s actually *back*, but every time he pulls up a memory or looks him straight in the eye, Richie believes it a little bit more.

“It felt like, like really fucking good when you were around me, and then especially when you touched me,” Eddie says, his hand in Richie’s, side by side on the bed. “I figured it meant something.”

“Meant what? That I’m, what did you say, ‘*really good with my hands*,’” Richie moans, imitating Eddie’s blissed-out voice, and Eddie’s face falls.

“Don’t fucking *mimic* me! Everyone sounds stupid during sex,” he shoves a hand at Richie, trying to tip him over onto his back, but Richie grabs hold and swirls a tongue over one of Eddie’s fingers.

“Not you, dude,” Richie says, eyes heavy as Eddie watches him fellate his hand. A hard burst of arousal has been spinning in Richie since he

came out to himself, and finally being with Eddie has cranked it up to eleven. At *least*.

"I can't get it up again, Richie, this is ridiculous," he says, but he's breathing hard, his lips parted. Richie gives him a break and moves away, pressing a kiss to his palm.

"Keep going, my touches saved your life, it forced you into a sexual crisis," he says, and Eddie glares at him.

"I hate that you're not wrong."

"Don't *fucking* stop. Don't stop touching me," Eddie groans, pressed tight against the wall of the shower. Richie's pinning his arm up with one hand and fucking him with the fist of the other, and Eddie's practically wailing.

"Wouldn't dream of it," Richie says, hand wet with it, the steam billowing around both of them.

"I could tell they were heading there. They were always staring at each other, *god*, it was insufferable."

"Bill and Mike. Lord almighty," Richie huffs, "I can't believe you didn't tell me."

Eddie's quiet for a few minutes, and Richie kisses at the nape of his neck, wrapped around him on the couch.

"When Bill said he was getting divorced, I knew they were together. I knew it for sure. And it all kinda fell on me, all the stuff I wasn't admitting but knew I was feeling." He presses further back into

Richie's chest. Richie wishes he could see his face.

"Did you tell Bev?" he asks, because if he told anyone, it was her.

"Not all of it." Eddie takes a deep breath. "I told her I was gay and that I needed to get the wheels rolling on my divorce."

Richie whistles, and Eddie giggles.

His head tips back onto Richie's shoulder, eyes closing.

Richie smacks a kiss to his cheek.

They stay in bed for almost four days, alternating between talking and fucking, ordering food and cuddling anywhere they can fit together, and eventually, fucking again, because that's where their cuddling always leads.

Richie spends most of the time worried Eddie will get sick of him, but it doesn't happen, and when the group chat gets too relentless, Eddie Face-Times everyone together from their bed. It's theirs now and Richie will never concede that point, even though no one is arguing with him.

Eddie's hair is a mess, sticking up at all angles from the rough pull of Richie's fingers when he tried his own hand (or mouth) at a blowjob. Richie had come in less than a minute and Eddie looked like he was considering getting angry, but then Richie grabbed at the lube and fingered any more thoughts out of him.

Bev exclaims at the sight of the two of them together, and Mike is in his little square alone until he screams for Bill to come join them immediately.

"I got the gist of what was going on from your text, Eddie, we didn't need the actual visual," Ben says, and Richie cracks up while Eddie frowns next to him.

“Oh shut up, you know you’re happy for me,” Eddie snaps back, and fuck, Richie loves him.

He wants to say it, but he realizes he *hasn’t* said it, and suddenly wishes his friends weren’t staring at them, all gooey-eyed.

“The point is,” Richie starts, needing this to end, “this is where we’ve been, fucking our brains out, please leave us alone for at least 48-” he ogles Eddie, red bite marks peppering his chest and stomach, loose limbs and pinched face, “72 more hours.”

Richie hits the red button on Eddie’s phone and bounces up so he’s kneeling to face him. Eddie makes a noise of complaint but Richie ignores him.

“I love you,” Richie says, and maybe it’s the fact that they’ve spent the last four days completely soaked up in each other, but it doesn’t feel like it’s a burden anymore.

Eddie blinks at him.

“This is why you hung up on our friends?” he says.

“*What?* ” Richie sputters.

“They wanted to know the story!”

“What are you talking about? None of them asked for a story.”

Eddie pouts. “Well *I* wanted to tell the story.”

“There’s no story, Eds, what the fuck, did you hear that I love you?”

“Of course I did, you ruthless dumbass. I love you, too.” Eddie’s not even smiling, says it like Richie already knows, and he probably should have. “Why do you think I got on a shitty plane in the middle of the night and then ignored all my friends for four days?”

Richie stares for a minute, feeling like an idiot. He raises both his hands.

“These bad boys?” he asks, doubling down.

Eddie tackles him again, and Richie's already half-hard by the time it leads to making out.

Bev still won't stop texting them, and when they wake up to another call on Saturday morning, they decide to face reality and let other people have their time and attention. So much for boundaries.

Richie's still grumpy about it as they're leaving. After locking the door, he turns to see Eddie waiting for him. Eddie smiles, reaching out to take his hand and tangling their fingers together.

When they arrive at breakfast, Richie's cheeks are sore from smiling the whole way there.

Mike meets them at the entrance and squeezes them together with a hug. Richie's feeling light and invincible and seeing his friends is like icing on the cake, he can't deny it, so he hugs Mike back and then plants a kiss on Eddie's cheek for good measure. Eddie rubs at his face and sticks his tongue out.

They sit at a table near the front where the rest of them have congregated, and Richie throws an arm around the back of Eddie's chair on instinct. Bev watches them, and Richie blows her a kiss. Ben swipes a hand in front of her face to mime catching it, and Eddie roars with laughter.

"Yeah, yeah, yuck it up," Richie says to Ben, while Bev and Eddie giggle themselves into a fury, "you're just jealous Eddie finally chose *me*."

Eddie pats solemnly at his thigh.

"I don't know, Rich, we did have two *full* weeks in that hotel room," he says, and Richie knows he's bullshitting, but he ends up picturing it, Eddie's fucked-out noises too near the surface of his memory, and he gets lost in the vision for a few seconds too long.

“Oh my god,” Ben groans. Richie snaps back to reality just as the waitperson asks for his order. Once they’re gone, Richie leans in to press his lips to the edge of Eddie’s ear.

“We chat, we eat, we *leave*,” he whispers, and Eddie laughs but he also nods, eyes unfocused, and Richie blows at his neck, just to watch him flinch.

Their food comes out quickly and it’s delicious, which is why this is *their* breakfast place. Bill steals a sausage from Mike’s plate and Eddie beats Richie to a joke, so he scoops out some sausage gravy and smears it all over Eddie’s veggie omelette in retaliation. Eddie slides his chair two inches away but eats it faster than usual.

A companionable silence falls over them once they’ve cleaned their plates, and Richie thinks this might be their cue to leave when Eddie clears his throat.

“I haven’t gotten one of these, uh. Group announcement moments. So I’d like to take this opportunity, just to update all of you,” Eddie says, and it’s so proper and nerdy that Richie wants to tease him, openly and loudly, but ends up just listening intently, because Eddie’s eyes are shining and Richie’s never been able to stop watching him. “I’m getting divorced and I’m gay.”

Bill chokes on his coffee, droplets flying everywhere. Mike bursts out laughing, but takes a napkin to the stains at the same time.

“Oh my god, Eddie,” Bill says, coughing between words.

“Yeah, dummy,” Bev agrees, her smile wide, “come up with something original, at least.” She winks at Richie.

“Oooh, I have one!” Richie says, bouncing in his seat and raising his hand. Eddie doesn’t call on him, just sits there looking frumpy.

“I hate all of you,” Eddie says, his mouth curved in a half-moon, the same way it gets when he’s concentrating, and Richie can’t wait to kiss him again.

Bev vaguely points in Richie’s direction, so he finally blurts: “He’s in love with me!”

Eddie's forehead hits the table with a thunk and a light rattling of dirty silverware. Mike makes a "ding ding ding" noise and Bev and Bill clap while Richie stands up to take a bow.

"And now we're fucking," Richie says, taking his seat and shaking at Eddie's shoulders. Half the table groans and the other half laughs, and that's how Richie knows they're all worth keeping around.

Eddie's first visit with Becky since he's been back is that Monday.

As soon as he leaves the apartment, Richie turns on his laptop to write. He stares at the blinking cursor for twenty minutes before giving up and googling "LGBT therapists in LA."

By the time Eddie comes back, Richie's emailed a few people that looked promising, including someone who wrote they specialized in "coming out late in life." Being in the know will help start them off easy, and then Richie can drop his thinly-veiled demon clown tales bit by bit. Really take it slow.

Eddie takes off his shoes and sits in the chair next to him. Richie leans forward from the couch to kiss him, and Eddie sighs, like he always does.

"I missed you, and this is how I know I have a problem," Eddie says, pushing at Richie's chest, teasing. Richie missed him, too.

"So," he starts, and Eddie grabs at his hands and it kind of makes Richie dizzy, "did she like Upgrade Eddie?"

Eddie whistles a breath out his teeth. "Is that what I fucking am to you?"

"Yeah, dude, you're both Eddies put into one," he says, and Eddie groans, "oh my god, *Super* Eddie works, too, honestly, whichever you prefer."

"I can't believe Becky was happy for me, I've made a horrible mistake."

Richie drums his fingers over Eddie's thigh. "Awww, Becks was happy? Cute!"

"I told you *not* to call her that."

"Yeah, yeah, okay. So you told her," Richie says, because this isn't a fucking joke, and he's trying to get better at making the distinction. Eddie grimaces.

"Of course," he answers, that familiar pinch in his brow, and Richie leans up to press his lips there. Eddie waves him away. Richie nips quickly at his cheek before leaning back. "It was a little weird. Not telling her, that was fine, she was glad, god knows I whined about you enough over the past few months."

Richie snorts and Eddie glares, but keeps going.

"Just being there with her again, after a long time. And everything was so different. I'm ready to work on all this shit, all this shit that was maybe under there all along and I couldn't reach it? It was like before."

Eddie's wringing at Richie's hands for him. "It was like *before*," he says, and it sounds like his breath is punched out of him.

"Hey, Eddie, it's okay, take a breath."

"No, it's-it's good. " Eddie says, but it's close to a choking sound, so Richie rubs a line slowly over the tops of his thighs.

"Yeah?"

"Yeah, I think it's a good thing?"

"You sure? Your good and bad faces kinda look the same," Richie says. Eddie laughs, doesn't pretend to be mad, and Richie takes a shaky breath.

"Yeah, yeah, thanks," he says, voice strong and even. "It's starting

over. Again. But I've done that a few times, so what's once more?" Eddie's voice is a bit high, and he's clearly trying to convince himself, but it kind of seems like it's working, since the words flow nice and easy.

"I'll try to keep up," Richie says, heart pounding, because hearing it so succinctly put is a little overwhelming.

"What're you up to?" Eddie points at his laptop and Richie sits up straight, pulling it off the table and flinging it open.

"Oh, so, I was trying to write my show, right? And I realized I imagined I was talking to Becky while I was doing it, which, *weird*, but also, *interesting*, so instead I looked up therapists in the area and I'm thinking my big gay awakening is more interesting fodder for a fucking therapist than a big-time comeback special, at least right now."

Eddie blinks at him, so Richie keeps going.

"Therapy has helped you a lot, and I figure I got some shit to deal with and we're going to be doing all this shit together now, not that we weren't before, but. Yeah," he says, and Eddie smiles, so Richie starts breathing again.

"Wow, Rich, that sounds great," he says, eyes wrinkled in the corners, and Richie wonders if he looks as love-struck as he feels. "What about the Netflix thing?"

"I guess... fuck it?" Eddie's face lights up, and Richie laughs. "Am I a fucking dumbass?"

"Surprisingly not, just in this very moment," Eddie says, gripping his fingers under Richie's legs and pulling him closer. Their knees knock and Richie's stubble scrapes at Eddie's chin as their mouths come together and Richie feels like he did something right.

Eddie doesn't unpack from New York until later that night, and he complains the entire time.

Richie kicks back on the bed and watches him.

"I don't like most of this. I don't even know why I packed it," Eddie says, fuming, holding up what looks like a burgundy sweater vest. "How did I not see this before? This is the fucking worst thing I've ever laid my eyes on."

"I think that looks adorable, I would pay money to see you in that," Richie says, and Eddie huffs at him.

Richie briefly considers requesting this unpacking party become an Eddie Fashion Show, but Eddie isn't done.

"I just don't understand how I managed to figure more out about myself in the last few months here than I did in my entire adult life."

"You didn't have me and Bev to dress you, Spaghetti, you were lost in the dark," Richie says, because he can't help but lend a hand while Eddie roasts every single item of clothing he brought back with him.

"I had a fucking say, moron. A deep understanding of style runs in my DNA. It could not be erased," Eddie says, and folds the sweater vest perfectly anyway because he's adorable, and suddenly Richie doesn't want to be so far away.

He slides toward the end of the bed and hangs his legs off the end.

"All these remaining sweater vests would beg to differ," he says, peering into Eddie's suitcase to see how much longer he gets to enjoy the show. There's a few more burgundy items, and Richie groans in excitement but it dies in his throat when he sees what's also expertly folded and tucked at the very bottom of the pile.

"Is that-is that my jacket?" he says without thinking. It's definitely his jacket, the one Eddie brought him, the one he used to find him, and Richie hasn't seen it since the first night he showed up. He looks up to see Eddie frozen, pale and caught.

"Yes. Yeah. It's your jacket. *Fuck.*" Eddie drops a pair of socks and

presses a hand to his mouth.

“You took my jacket to New York?”

“Yeah, listen-”

“That’s... super creepy, Eds,” Richie says, and his mouth stretches around a smile, elated and smug.

Eddie’s had his jacket this *whole* time. He even took it back to New York with him.

Richie can now officially die happy. Eddie Kaspbrak’s a fucking sappy romantic.

“Don’t make a fucking *thing* about this,” Eddie says, snatching the jacket from his suitcase when he sees Richie reaching for it. “It was just the only item I had on me other than the clothes on my back and it has your dumb name on it and keeping it around always... helps.” Richie’s breath gets caught in his throat.

“Eddie.” Richie presses a hand to Eddie’s arm. Eddie’s smile is crooked, like he’s trying to find it funny but failing.

“I know I haven’t told you what happened, but sometimes I like to have it-”

“Eds, you don’t have to, you don’t owe me anything,” Richie says, stroking his hand up and down. Eddie shakes his head.

“You being out there was what got me through it,” Eddie says, firm and loud. He shifts so he’s standing between Richie’s knees, and Richie cranes his neck, but only a little, and it would usually make him laugh but then Eddie’s lips are on his.

Richie doesn’t need to ask, is pretty sure he knows what Eddie means because he feels the same exact way. It’s gripping on every single edge of his heart, how lucky he is, and how much he stupidly longs to figure out ways to make everything easier for the both of them, both starting over at their age. He licks at Eddie’s bottom lip and moves to flip him onto his back, needing to show him, needing to take care of him.

Once Eddie's on the bed, Richie crawls over him. Eddie leans up to kiss him again, and Richie moans. Eddie breaks off, panting. It's always so fucking quick, Eddie getting breathless and desperate. Whether he's ranting or info dumping or dirty talking or just making out against the fridge, it drives Richie crazy.

"Did you jerk off to my jacket, Spaghetti?" Richie says, looking directly into Eddie's eyes, and Eddie surges forward to bite at Richie's chin.

"So fucking what if I did?" Eddie says, voice deep, squirming under Richie, and he suddenly wants all their clothes off. He sticks a frenzied hand down to lift at Eddie's shirt and yanks it over his head, both of them sitting up to make it even.

He thinks of Eddie, alone on his bed, clutching that stupid fucking jacket, hand around his dick, trying to keep quiet so Richie didn't hear him in the next room.

God, they're both so fucking stupid.

"I thought of you, too," Richie says, because it's true, kissing it into the skin of Eddie's neck, "when you were gone. Fuck, and before that, *god*, I'm sorry, but I did." He hears Eddie inhale sharply and bends up to kiss him on the mouth, feeling horrible.

"The first time was after you touched me, while we were laughing, after my first therapy session," Eddie says in a rush, and Richie groans in his ear, really relieved and really fucking turned on. Eddie laughs, sweet and low.

Richie rolls on top of him, closing him in with his arms on either side, and Eddie stares up at him. There's still layers of clothes between them, but Richie can feel him, hard against his stomach, and he wants to be inside Eddie like this, between his legs, rubbing tight and fucking slow until Eddie comes all over both of them.

He ruts against Eddie instead, kissing him deep, tipping his head just how Eddie likes. He slips a hand down to wrap around Eddie's hip bone, then grip at the trail of hair leading into his briefs. Eddie breaks off with a moan.

“What’d you think about?” Richie asks, because he can’t stand not knowing, and now that his mouth is free he wants to make all of Eddie’s dirty dreams come true. Eddie arches his hips into Richie’s touch.

“Jesus, I don’t know, just about how your hands felt on me,” Eddie says, finally pushing his underwear down so Richie can get a good grip on him. Richie groans at the feel, rolling to the side to take a look at Eddie’s gorgeous dick. Eddie scrabbles at his back, keeping him in place.

“What do you want, babe?” Richie asks, and Eddie twitches in his hand. *Fuck*.

“Don’t call-can you fuck me?” Eddie says, face red, and Richie almost blacks out.

“You sure?” Richie says, even though he’s already heading to get the lube and a condom from the bedside table. Eddie’s nodding when he leans back over him, and Richie reels at the sight of him, chest heaving, black undies pushed down to his knees, hand reaching out to pull Richie back on top of him. Richie’s head falls, landing in the crook of Eddie’s arm, and he breathes in Eddie’s scent and licks over the bumpy line of his ribs.

“Yeah, I’m sure, you’ve fingered me enough for me to know I’m sure, you weirdo, get back *up* here,” Eddie says, giggling and grabbing at Richie’s arms, and Richie kneels up but he goes between Eddie’s legs, and Eddie breathes out a tiny “*oh*” that goes straight to Richie’s dick.

“Okay, but I’m much, much bigger than my measly fingers,” Richie says. He’s panicking a little, but Eddie brings a leg up to his chest to make it easier, and he wants this too badly to fumble everything.

Eddie scoffs. “You wish.”

Richie presses a finger in, slow and careful, and Eddie groans. Richie hates not being able to kiss him, so he shifts forward between Eddie’s thighs to get at his mouth. He keeps at it for a few minutes, adding fingers and speeding up, before Eddie’s head falls back onto his pillow.

“*Fuck*,” Eddie says, “okay, let’s do this.”

When Richie presses in, he can’t focus on anything but the hold of Eddie’s fingers around his hips. Eddie’s eyes are blown, and Richie goes so fucking slow, moving when Eddie guides him, hands showing him the way.

“*Eddie*,” he says, kissing at Eddie’s cheeks, cupping at his jaw as he shakes above him. He rubs a thumb over Eddie’s lips. Eddie pulls him in further and then Richie starts thrusting in earnest.

“Faster, a little faster,” Eddie breathes, shifting his hips on the sheets. Richie follows his orders, pressing his toes into the mattress for leverage, and Eddie’s eyes flutter closed.

“Good?” Richie asks and Eddie moans.

“Yeah, you got it, it’s good, you’re doing it,” Eddie says, all in a gasp, and Richie laughs. Eddie rambles nonsense when they’re having sex, and Richie loves to hear how stupid it all makes him, to know it feels so good that his brain ceases all other efforts.

Richie works him over gently, and they rock together for a long time, quiet but for their breathing and Eddie’s occasionally whining. When Richie hits Eddie’s prostate, he can tell by how Eddie jerks, *hard*, his legs dangling in the air, and Richie almost comes on the spot when Eddie clenches around him.

“Eds, *jesus*, don’t *do* that,” he says, heaving a breath to calm down, his hips still twitching, the bastards. Eddie’s practically thrashing, and his fingernails accidentally scratch at the skin of Richie’s back. He hisses as pain blooms there, but Eddie’s losing it underneath him and it only makes him want to finish the job.

“Sorry, oh my *fuck*, that was just good,” Eddie moans, his eyes frazzled, “are you okay?”

“Yeah, yeah, god, you’re so *hot*,” Richie says, blowing a piece of hair out of his face and stretching a whole hand around the meat of Eddie’s thigh. He grinds into Eddie slowly, angling for that spot again, and finds it quickly.

“Fuck, fuck, Richie,” Eddie says when he starts hitting it with every thrust forward, and Richie doesn’t think he’ll last much longer, not with Eddie so hot and tight, pushing back against him, the sound of their skin slamming together a loud and filthy echo.

Eddie wraps an arm around his back, pulling him closer as his hips start to shake.

“I love you, come on,” Eddie says into his ear. Richie feels the world swallow him whole and he stutters inside Eddie, pushing up hard and coming into the condom. He presses his face into Eddie’s collarbone and sobs, sucking in giant patches of air. Eddie holds him through it.

He stays inside long enough to jerk Eddie off, tight and fast, and Eddie moans every time he says it back.

Richie knows Eddie won’t be home when he gets back, but he still feels a tug of sadness when it turns out to be true.

Eddie had almost asked his new firm to extend his start day by a week because of Richie’s first therapy appointment, but Richie insisted that was stupid. Instead, Eddie blew him in the shower this morning and Richie sent him off with a giant cup of sludge coffee and a gluten free muffin.

He calls Bev while he waits for noon to roll around because that’s when Eddie’s lunch break is.

“How was it?” she asks as soon as her face appears on his phone, and Richie laughs at her.

“You’re so fucking bad at having a conversation,” he says, and realizes he’s a little uncomfortable, even though he called her.

Therapy wasn’t as easy as he thought it would be, no matter how much Eddie had yelled “You can’t *ace* therapy, jackass,” at him when he hypothesized about it, and he finds himself clamming up when

asked about it point blank.

"I've been told," Bev says, and her voice mellows out. "Do you wanna talk about it? Or do you just need a distraction?"

Richie sighs and closes his eyes. He feels a little raw. It was mostly a session of ice-breakers, getting to know him, but then "Darren" had asked him why he was there and what he wanted out of therapy and he completely froze. He left his office with a few assignments, and number one was to think about goals. Richie had felt a little nauseous as they made their next appointment, hoping Eddie wouldn't be disappointed in him for not going into this with a plan.

"It was only the first time, so we'll see, I just hope I don't suck at it," he says, finally, and Bev makes an incredulous noise.

"Impossible."

"Don't you fucking underestimate me."

She laughs, and he breathes a little easier.

"You'll get the hang of it. Or maybe you won't, and something else will help," Bev says.

"This isn't the goal-setting I had in mind," Richie says back. He pulls off his shoes and heads to the fridge for an iced tea. "Can I have a distraction now?"

Bev doesn't even hesitate, just blurts, "I decided to get married," and Richie's glad he waited to take a drink, but he still sputters.

"Don't be too quick to congratulate me," she says after he's been choking on his own spit for a full minute.

"Fuck, sorry, that. You really want to get married again? I thought-"

"It's different with him," she says, and her voice sounds floaty and far-off. Richie smiles. "We both want it, we're both really in this. Before it always seemed... do you know what I mean?"

Richie's phone pings and a picture of Eddie appears to signal he's

calling. It's one he snapped in bed and Eddie was too slow to wrestle his phone away and delete it, so he set it as Eddie's contact picture and has yet to regret it. The sun's shining on his face and his arm is thrown over his eyes, one dimple in his cheek still visible. He looks happy and flushed, and only Richie knows that's what he looks like after they've spent all morning fucking their brains out.

"I think I do," Richie says, and Bev smiles at him. "I gotta go, my little worker bee is calling, but I'll see you tomorrow?"

She nods and he presses the button to answer Eddie. He's not Face Timing, but Richie's smile goes wide when he hears Eddie's voice on the line.

"Hey bud, I'm on lunch, finally, man, they really threw me in head-fucking-first," he says, sounding tense, and Richie wishes he were there with him, but he also knows Eddie's got this. He could do pretty much anything he sets his mind to, and he's really seeing that through, first by powering through his divorce and then finding a job out in LA.

"Everyone nice?" Richie asks, and Eddie hums.

"For the most part. There's this guy named Chris here who also just started, and he keeps jumping in to answer things before me, it's really fucking annoying."

"I've never met a Chris I can stand," Richie says. Eddie laughs.

"A-fucking men," he says, sing-song, and Richie forgets he was stressed. "But fuck Chris, how did therapy go?"

"Ugh, he was no Becky." Richie feels a little lighter, Eddie's bickering unraveling his stress, but he's still hesitant. "I think it might take a little longer for me to find someone that fits." Eddie doesn't miss a beat.

"That's fine, Rich, I'm proud of you for trying," he says. Richie isn't sure why he ever doubts Eddie, for all his teasing he's always kind when things get real.

"You sound just like her," Richie says, an exaggerated sob, and he

hears Eddie groan.

“If you don’t shut up about Becky I’m gonna start to get jealous.”

Richie pauses, thinking of what Bev said, pressing the phone tight to his ear.

“Don’t you fret, Spaghetti-man,” Richie says, and the words roll easy off his tongue, “you’re pretty much it for me.”

Author's Note:

Thank you for reading. Every single comment helps me write more porn, please contribute if you're able. I'm seriously considering/already working on an Eddie POV for this. Find me on tumblr at [tinyangryeddie](#).